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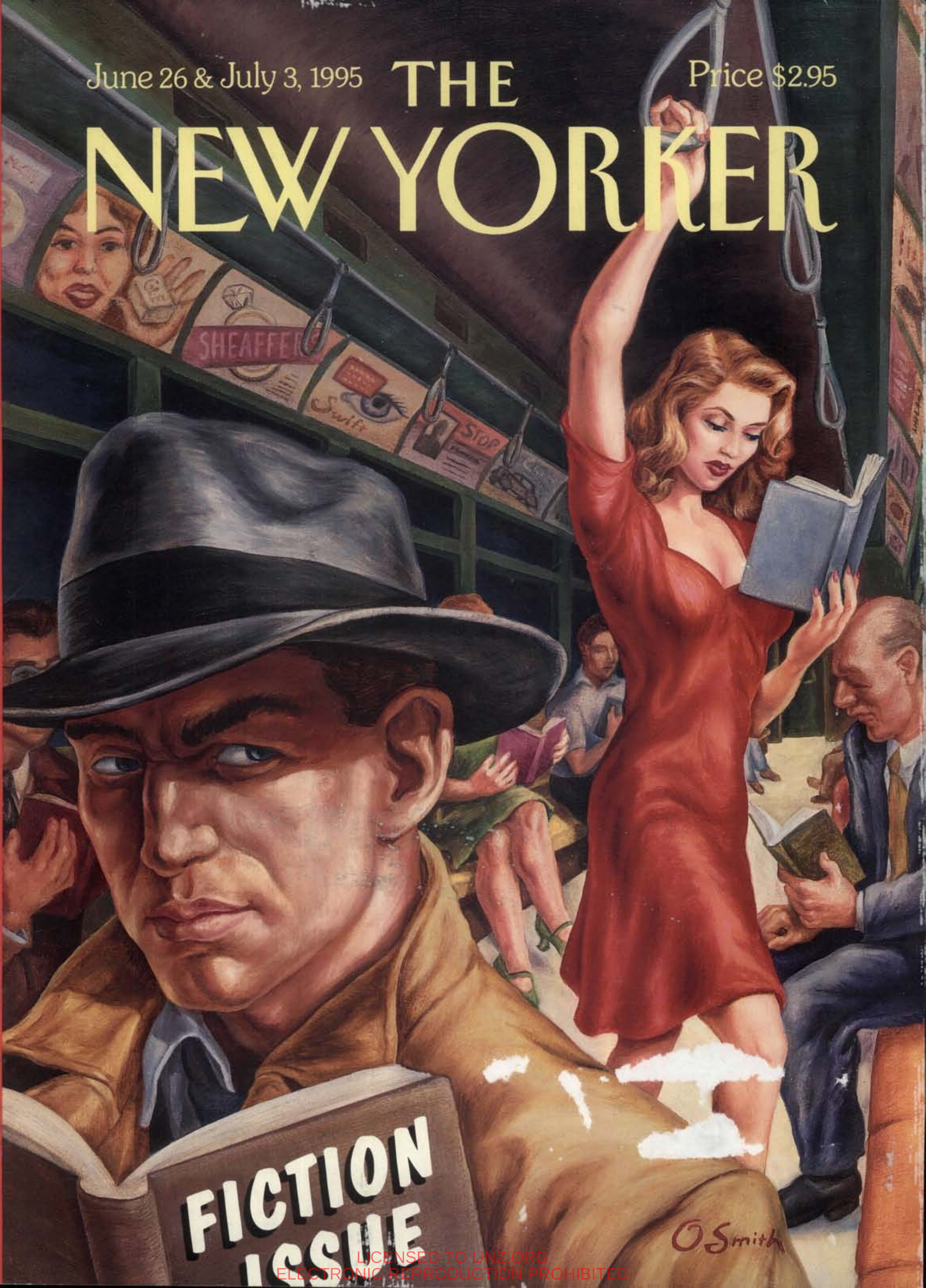

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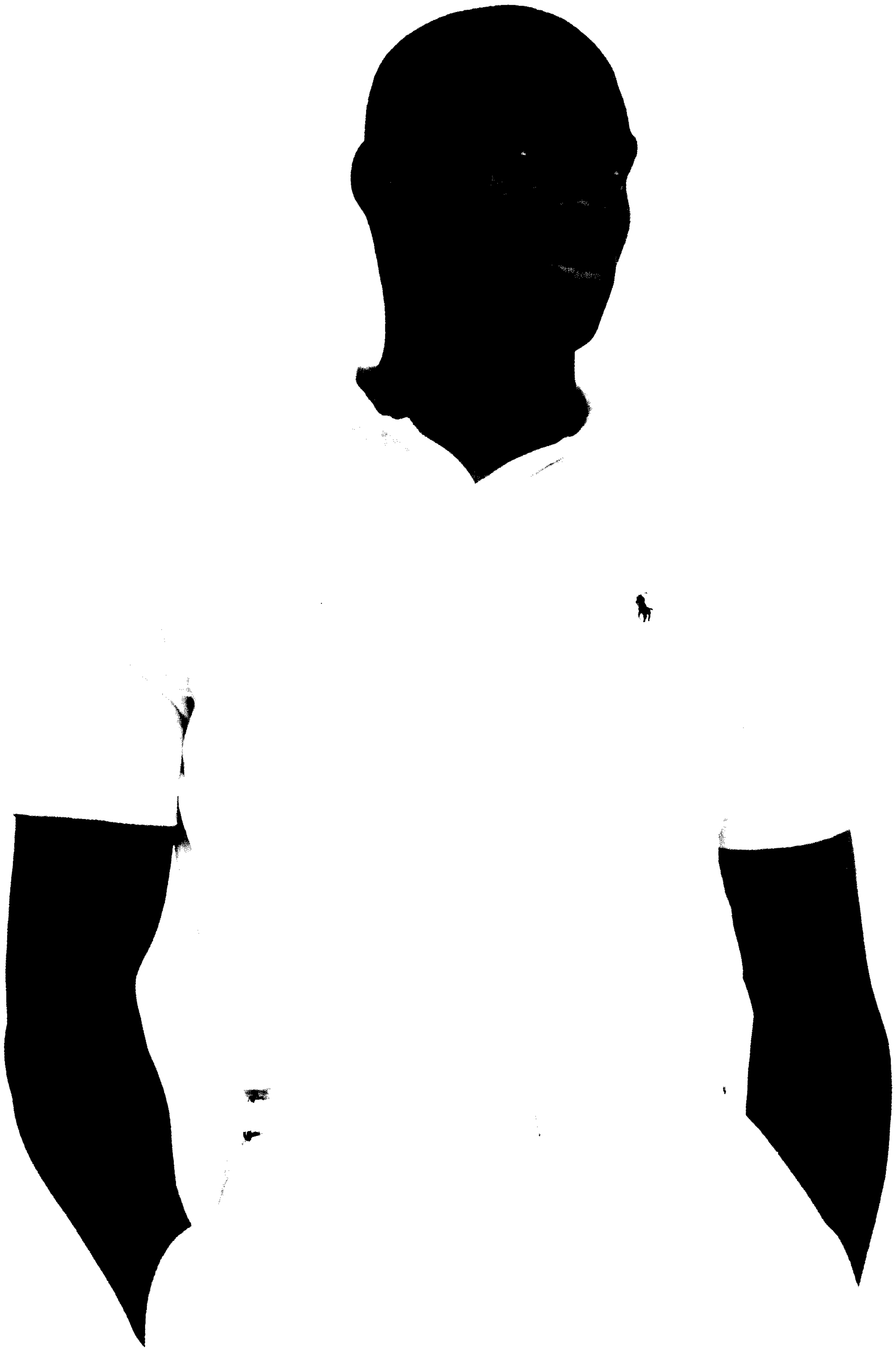

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THE NEW YORKER

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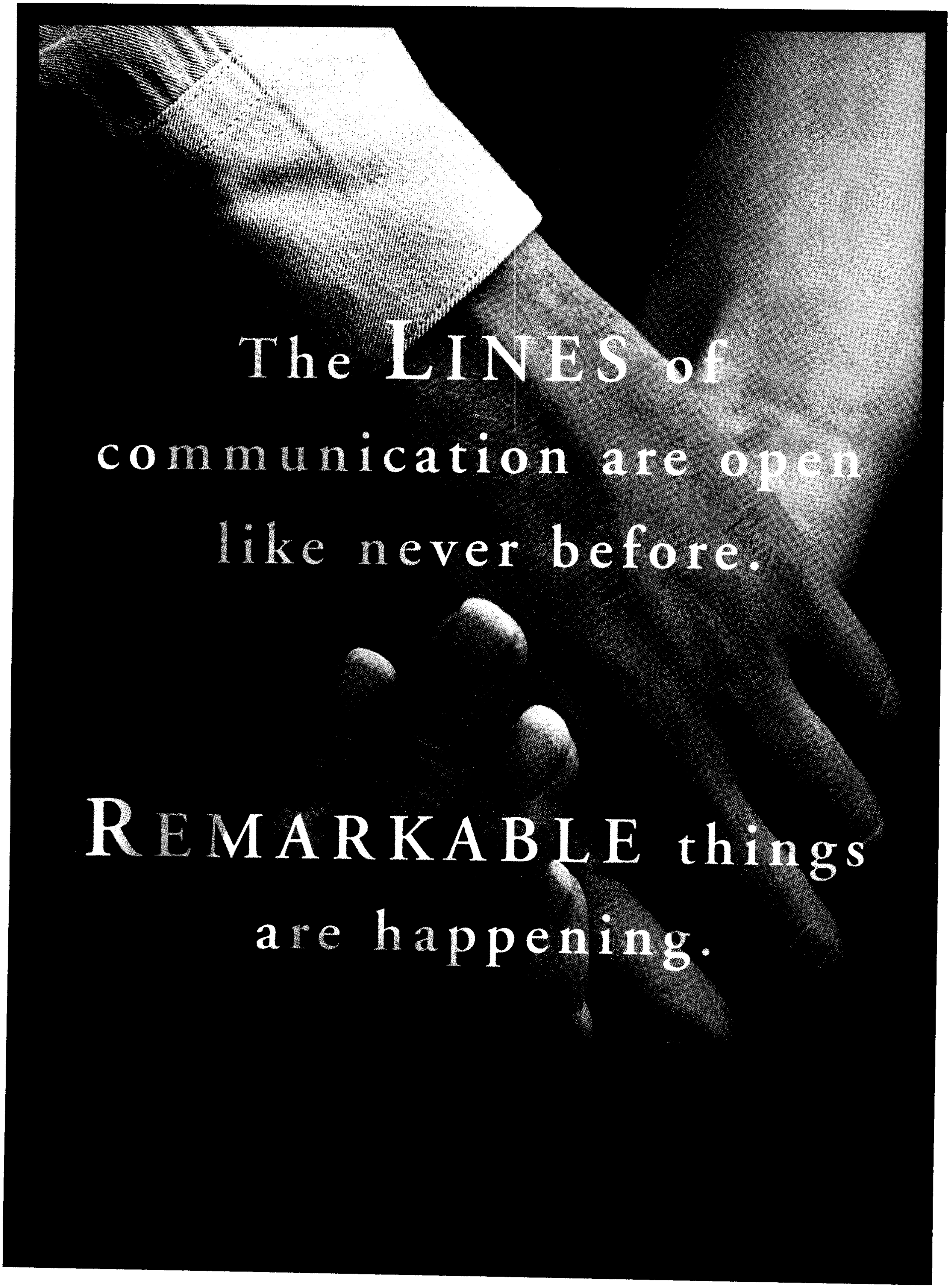
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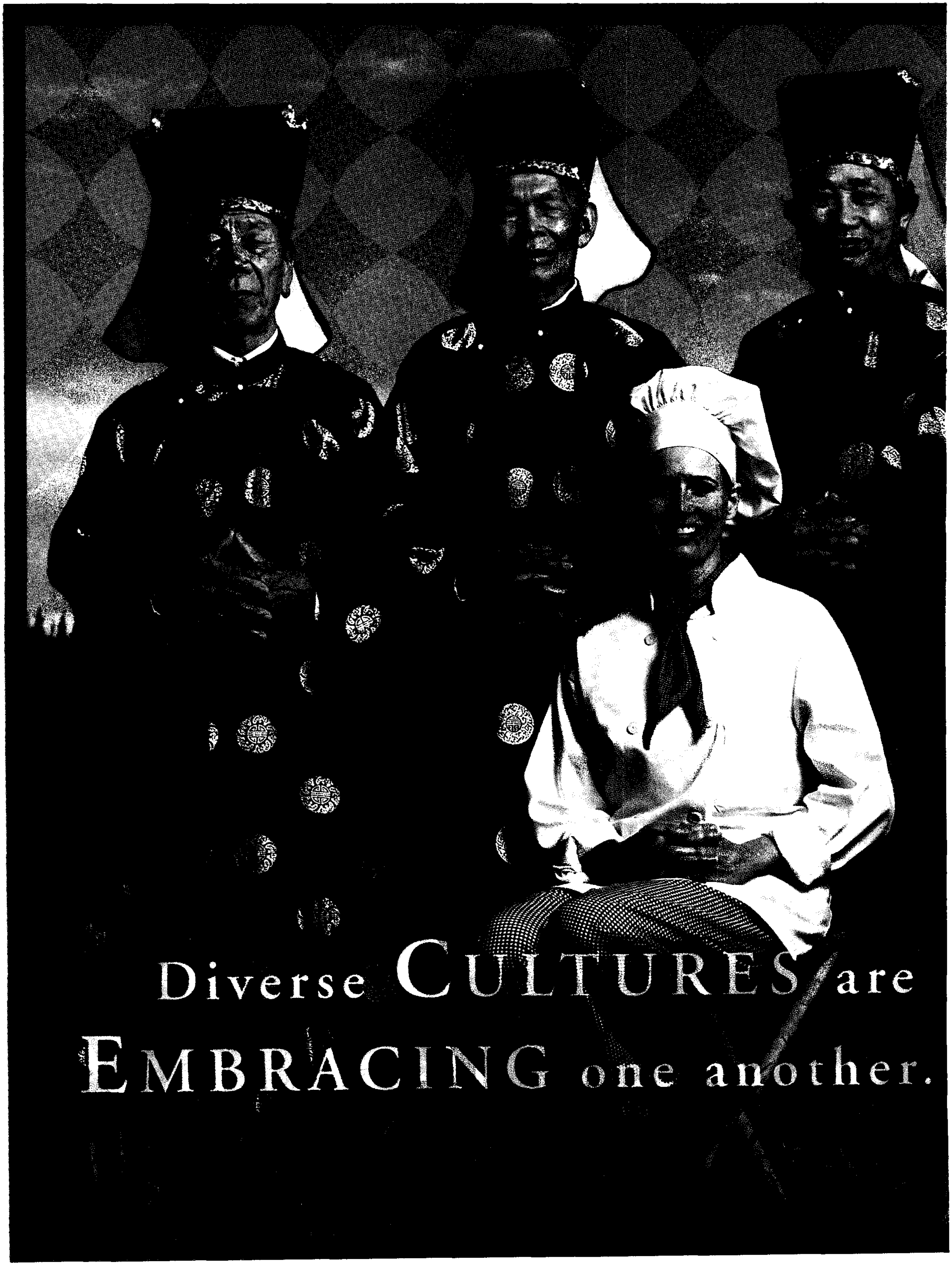
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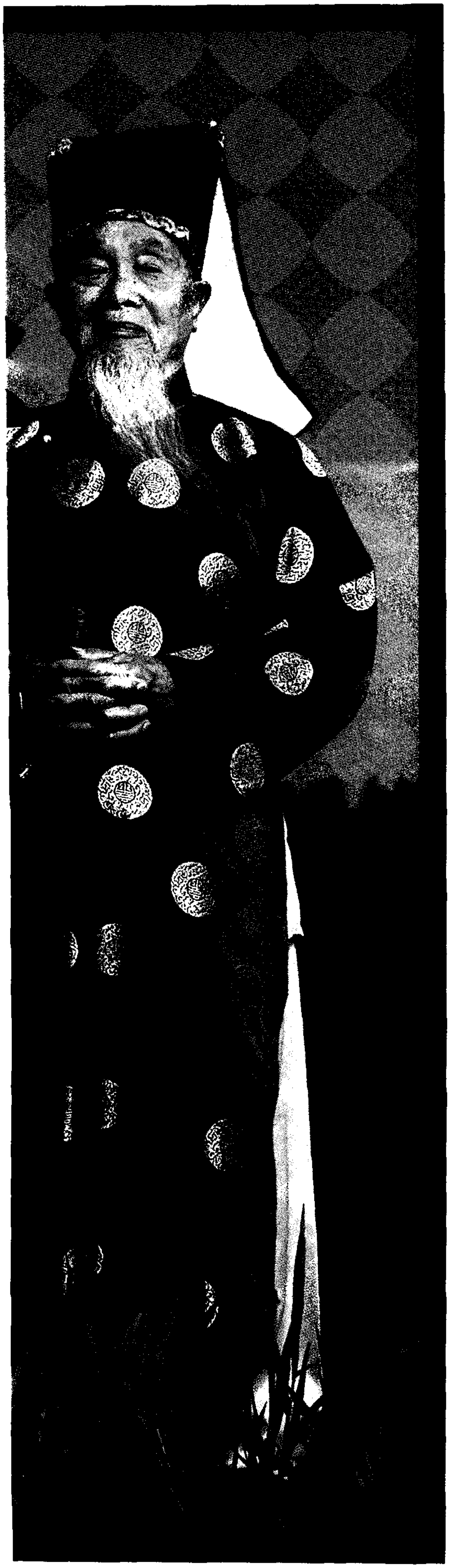

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COMMENT

THE OBSESSIVES

Novelists are different from you and me.

FEW experiences can be more unsettling than disturbing a novelist at work—by an inopportune phone call, for instance, or a badly timed visit. Just thought I'd drop by for a cup of coffee, you say, but the moment you walk through the door you know something is wrong. There isn't any eye-contact for a start, or, if there is, it's cursory, evasive: not unfriendly, just not quite welcoming. And then there is the face: did this face, slightly contorted—not puffy, exactly, but not entirely of the right proportions—really look like this the last time the two of you met? There's a smile—not what you'd call a real smile, but a crooked, ruined imitation of a smile, a non-smile, because the face itself is not a real face but a non-face, hastily put on, like a mask, owing to the necessity of having to be in the room with you, "enjoying" a cup of coffee, when in fact the brain has been left behind, back in the study, pressed up against the screen of a word-processor, stuck there like some relentless suction cup, immovable, still trying to make out what will happen next. What is going on inside that head, you wonder. What thoughts are careering out of control? What demons? But you don't ask.

Fiction writers are not normal people, however capable they may be of acting as if they were. Earlier this month, at the American Booksellers Association's annual convention, in Chicago, a happy confederation of novelists and journalists and biographers and television celebrities convivially promoted their books, as if they were all the same kind of writer, with the same kind of book. But the problems of expression that would have been faced by Studs Terkel while he was compiling his book on aging, or by Larry King or Bill Moyers while each was culling his favorite interviews, or by Colin Powell as he was recalling great moments in what is indubitably a great life (to name but four of the non-fiction authors on display and available to the public in Chicago) were of an entirely different order from what any novelist would have had to wrestle with—Richard Ford, say, or Walter Mosley, or Dorothy Allison, or Kazuo Ishiguro (among the fiction-writing counterparts also there to be touched and talked to). Even before setting out to write, Studs Terkel, Larry

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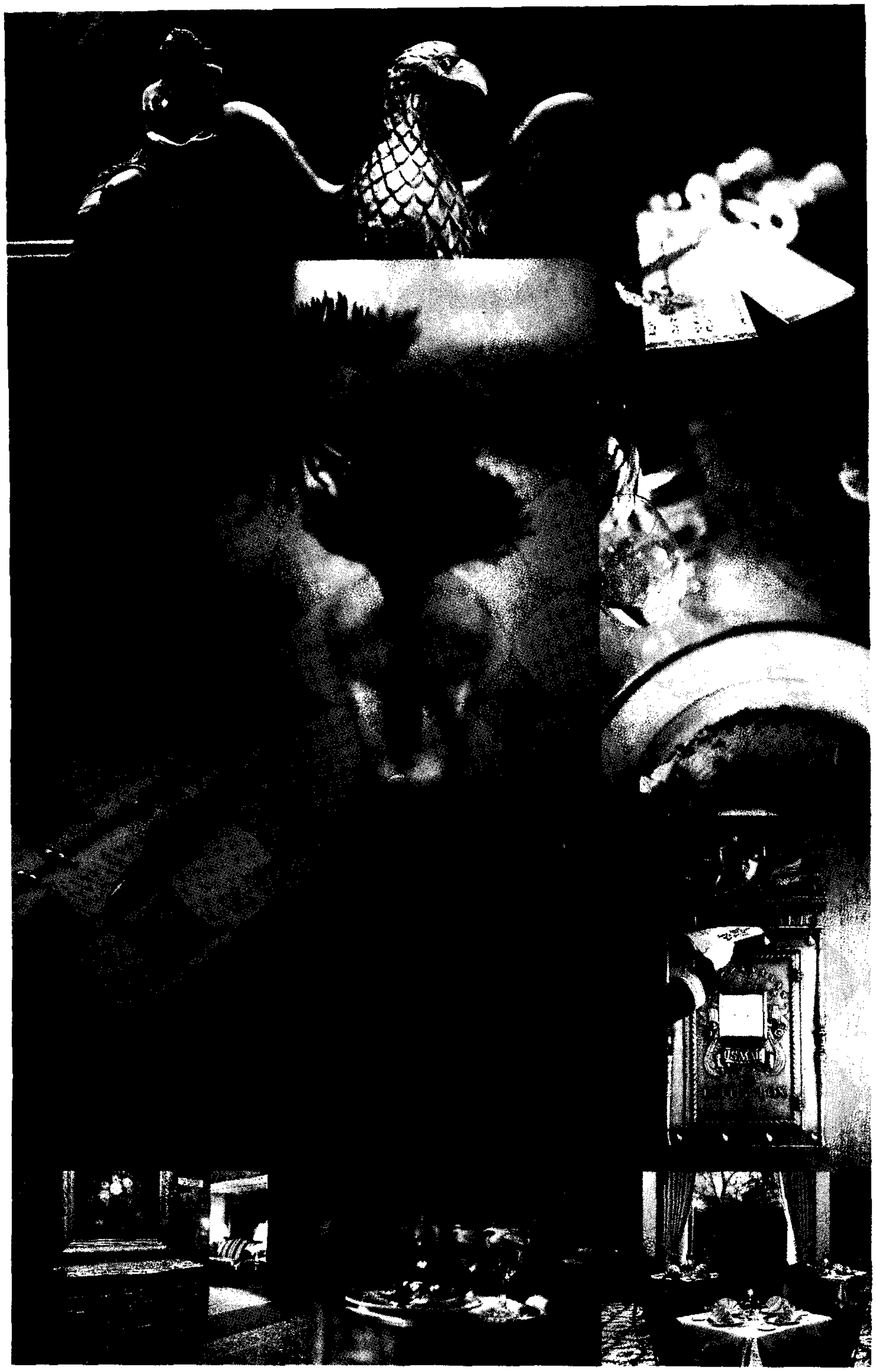

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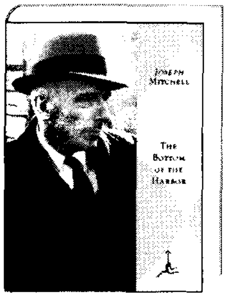

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King, Bill Moyers, and Colin Powell would have known two important things: their story, and that people wanted to read it. What novelist knows either of those things beforehand? The non-fiction writer usually has a third thing as well (made possible by knowing the story and that people want to read it): a contract.

Novelists are different. Like entrepreneurs, they are distinguished by the irrational confidence that the world is going to want what it doesn't even know exists. How else to explain the persistence of the young John Fowles, working away in silence, without money or readers, morning after morning, writing seven novels before one was published? Or the rejected short stories, one after another, that were returned to Raymond Carver and Grace Paley before, finally, slowly, their talent was recognized? Or the sheer power of will that enabled Salman Rushdie to write "Midnight's Children," after enduring the indifferent reception of his first novel and the outright rejection by his publisher of his second? The determination, the obsession, the relentless drive to write stories for people who don't even know they want to read them: who could call this normal? Isn't it just a little sick?

This special issue of *The New Yorker* is dedicated to the slightly unstable, wonderfully confused people who make up the stories that we in fact like to read very much. In addition to seven works of fiction, including an unpublished episode from the newly discovered manuscript of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," this issue is distinguished by non-fiction that consists principally of pieces—journals, letters, and, in the case of John Updike, a review of a writer's biography—that invite us to see what it is to be a novelist: a glimpse, if you like, of those demons that we always suspected might (or might not) be lurking inside there somewhere.

And what do we learn? Much, perhaps, that we expected—quirkiness and crankiness and downright eccentricity. But other things as well.

First, the fallacy of the imagination. It is a commonplace that novelists are different from other writers owing to the mysterious, even magical workings of the imagination—that elusive, never quite defined ability to lie persuasively. We are all familiar with the formula of what it takes to be a writer. A bit of education, some experience of the world, and something else: an imagination. But what, exactly, is this quality, this thing, this imagination? And how many writers' achievements can be genuinely attributed to this miracle of mendacity? Some, certainly, but what emerges primarily from these journals and letters is an appreciation not of the imaginative faculty, or of any other high or elaborate form of lying, but of serious writers' ability to engage the immediate world around them. Fact, not fancy.

Second, the authority of narrative. Fiction writers tell stories, whether the stories are made up or not. The journals of Dawn Powell read like a mini-book of mini-stories—one compact, perfectly formed narrative followed by another. So do the journals of Leonard Michaels: these are narrative units drawn from real, observed life, in which a story—this thing with a beginning, a middle, and an end—serves as an essential device of the human mind: a way of preserving experience, retaining it, making sense of it.

And, finally, the high seriousness. What is a writer? This is the question that tacitly informs the letters written by V. S. Naipaul to Paul Theroux. How is a writer different? What is expected of him or her? In the course of nineteen years of correspondence, a specific description emerges. The writer—admittedly, a certain kind of writer—is one who lives for his work, which is more important to him than any other thing or relationship in his life. He cares passionately about his sentences, his words, his punctuation. He is unapologetic about his seriousness and is marked by an unforgiving integrity. He is committed implacably to his task: he works for no one but himself. He is not above thinking about his sales: his readers are his livelihood as well as the proof that his work lives. And this more than anything else (so magisterially evident in Naipaul's letter of January 7, 1970): a writer has no choice but to be a writer.

Ours is not a time of heroes, and perhaps we are the better for it. But there are a few, and among them, surely, are the irrational, unstable, obsessed people who work in solitude, filling up a blank page, making up stories that tickle and tease and torture and, finally, teach us so many things that we could never learn any other way. —BILL BUFORD

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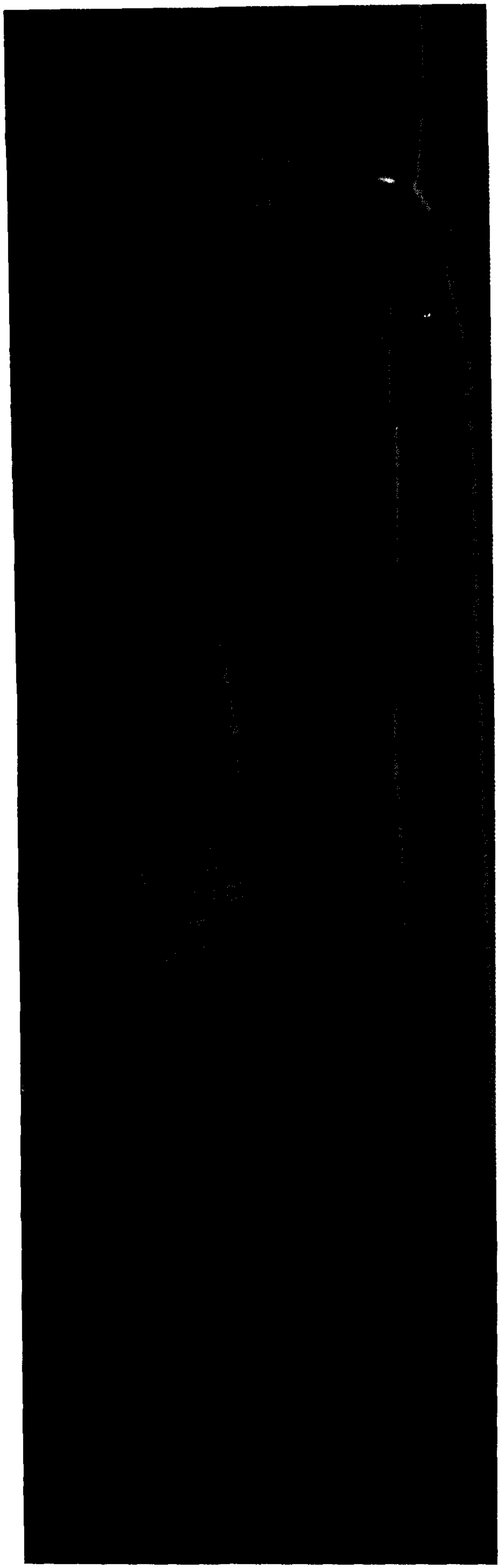

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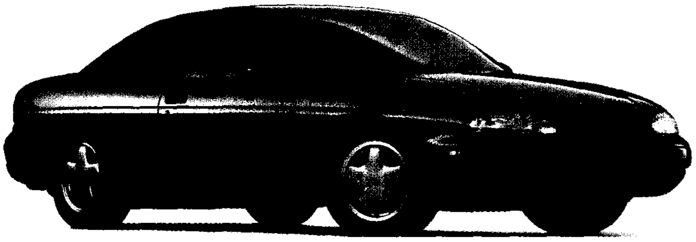

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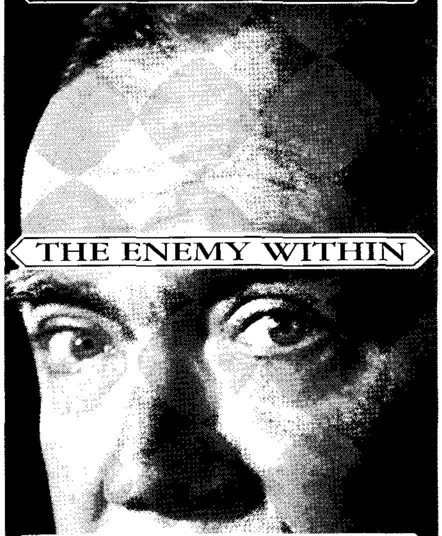


IN THE MAIL

THE LIONS OF LITERATURE

Edward Sorel’s salute to the New York Public Library’s lions on your May 22nd cover (“The Roar of the Crowd”) was whimsically appropriate. My family, from a small Missouri town, spent the 1924-25 academic year in New York City while my father studied at Columbia. Our first sightseeing tour included a visit to the great library—the first one that I, at the age of ten, and my brother, aged seven, had experienced. The lions awed us, but they also seemed benign and comforting, as good sentinels should. So, with our parents, we passed by the creatures, through the library’s doors, and entered another world.

IMOGENE CARUTHERS HORTON
Mardela Springs, Md.

A DECISION OF ONE’S OWN

The subject of euthanasia deserves more discussion than it gets in this country, where debate is rarely supported by research or by personal accounts such as the one Andrew Solomon shared about his mother’s suicide (“A Death of One’s Own,” May 22nd). As someone living with AIDS, I get tired of listening to well-meaning (and healthy) extremists on both sides of the euthanasia “problem,” who seem to forget that we are all human beings and must die sooner or later. For those of us facing the reality of a painful, possibly dehumanizing death, the euthanasia debate involves many issues that are not easy to discuss. But shielding ourselves from it won’t make it go away. Thank you for holding up a mirror so we can better see ourselves and our human fragility.

MICHAEL BILUNAS
Philadelphia, Pa.

If we in America truly value personal freedom, then we must begin to deal openly with that most immutable fact of life: death. If life is a continuum—and according to almost every philosophy and religion it is—then we need to acknowledge that just as during gestation the state’s interest in preserving life grows, in the dying process the state’s interest must necessarily recede.

People are currently receiving aid-in-dying, but unfortunately they’re receiving it without legal guidelines and without the guarantee that it is the patient, and only the patient, who makes the decision to end his or her life. The medical community needs to work with legislators to insure that such guidelines and guarantees are written into law.

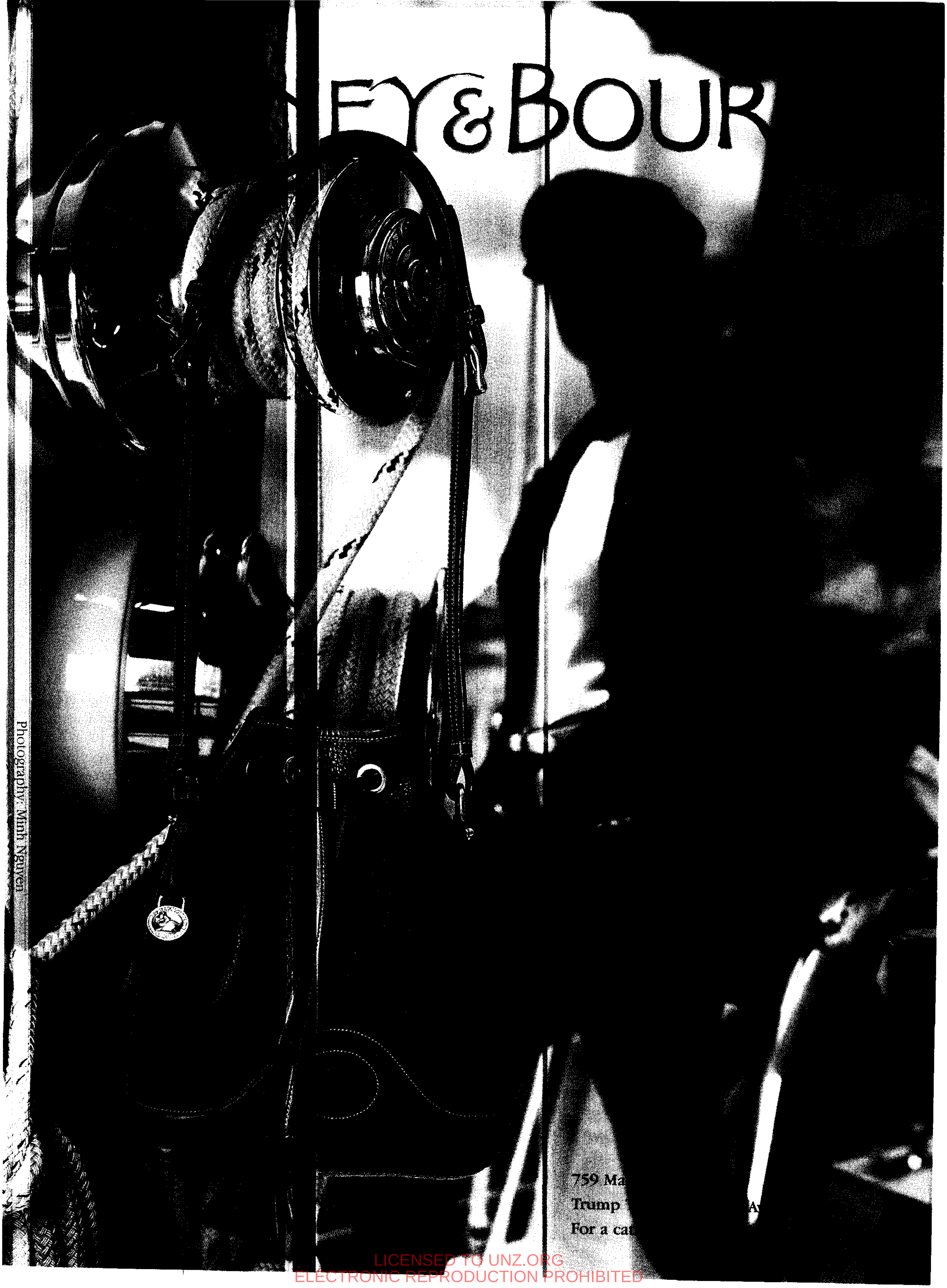
ANITA RUFUS
Americans for Death with Dignity
San Carlos, Calif.

Mr. Solomon’s unquestioning acceptance of the notion that “control” is essential to being human is disappointing. My experience as a pastor is that a lot of pain and suffering are related to people’s belief that they ought to be in control of parts of their lives which are mostly beyond control—illness, death, the behavior of others, and so on. The hope that “a death of one’s own” is possible may be the cruelest illusion of all.

I thank God that Solomon’s family was involved in his mother’s decision. Moral choices of this magnitude need to include a wider community in order to get an honest appraisal of whether one’s proposed death represents courage or cowardice, wisdom or foolishness, holy responsibility or an inappropriate attempt at control.

REVEREND ANDREW MACBETH
Virginia Beach, Va.

Mr. Solomon’s piece may have left your readers with the unfortunate impression that assisted suicide is the only answer to fears of losing control over one’s death, and that Choice in Dying



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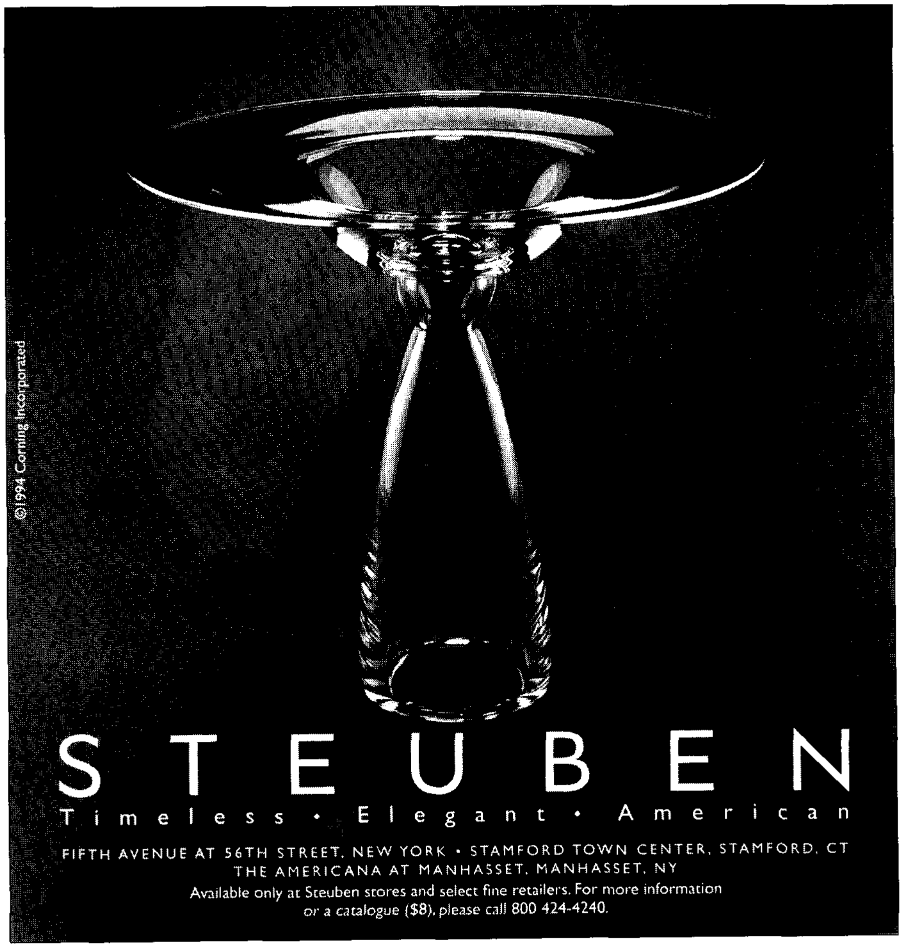

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is a group that champions the cause of assisted dying. In fact, Choice in Dying does not. In any case, assisted dying is just one of many options available to people near the end of life. Choice in Dying is devoted to insuring that dying persons are treated with dignity and respect: that their rights to appropriate palliative treatment (including adequate pain medications) are secure and that they are able to participate fully in decisions about their medical treatment.

KAREN ORLOFF KAPLAN
Choice in Dying
New York City

"A Death of One's Own" refutes the notion that assisted suicide in the face of terminal illness is, even incidentally, an act of kindness toward those who remain. The exercise of one's right to die establishes a family norm against which each member then measures his or her right to live. When one is faced with this imperative, ever less compelling circumstances—Mr. Solomon cites the prospect of a lonely old age—may seem sufficient cause. Is the "heady dominion" of deciding when we die worth leaving such a grim legacy?

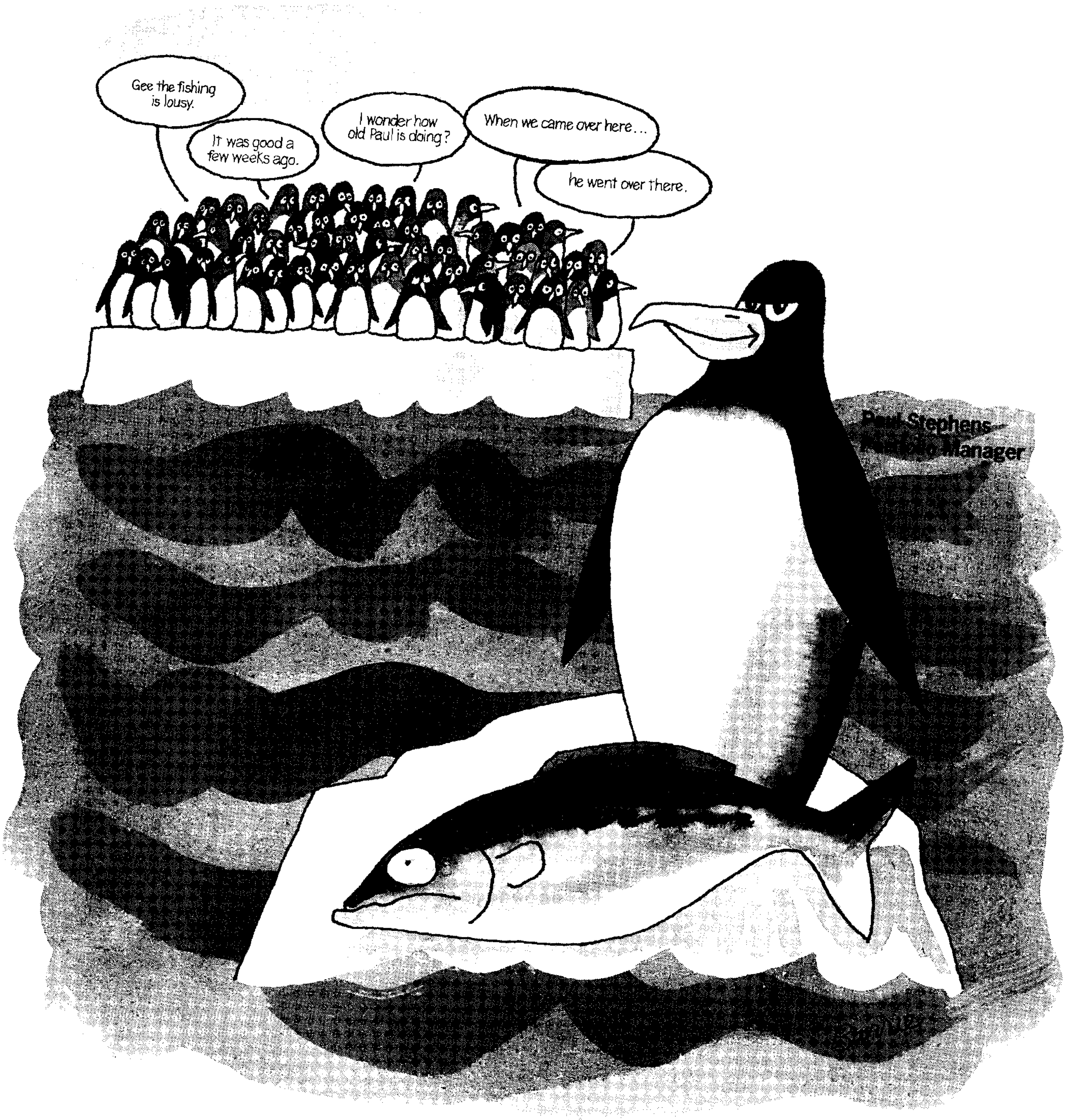
ANN BURACK-WEISS
New York City

It is common to read that something "brought tears to my eyes," but I defy anyone to read Mr. Solomon's account of his mother's dying statements to her husband and sons without crying. I want to keep the article, with that passage underlined, among my clippings so that my daughter can find it after my death.

I lived through the terrible death (unplanned and unassisted) of my husband, in the last stages of multiple sclerosis. I still suffer the aftermath. How I wish I could have helped him to the kind of death described by Solomon. I understand that after living through such an ordeal one resolves firmly not to allow it to happen again. I believe in euthanasia and deplore the activities of the busybodies who try to make their dogma an unwritten law for the rest of us.

JACQUELINE BRIGGS
Norwich, England

Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "In the Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.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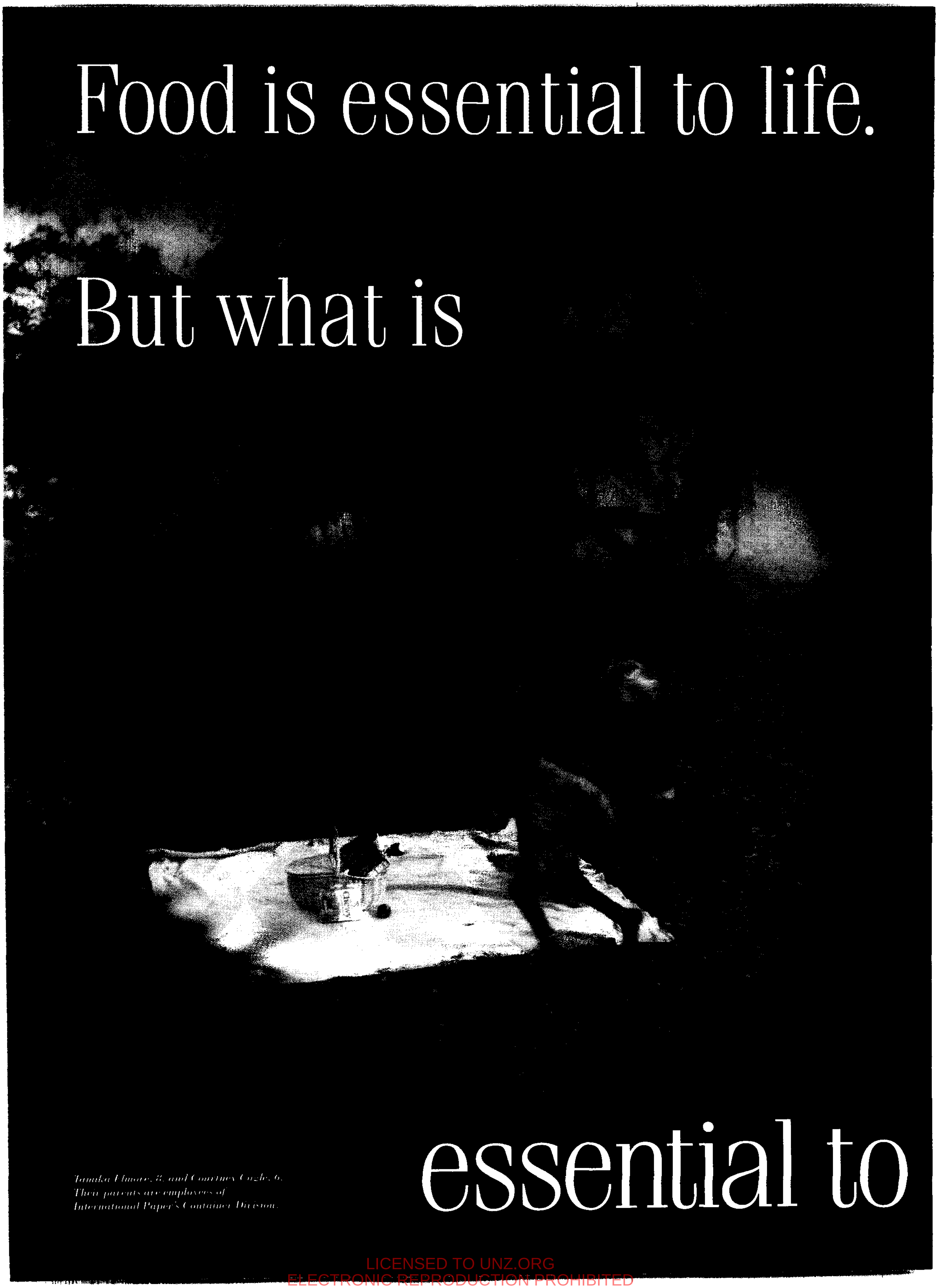
Food is essential to life.
But what is
essential to

Tamika Elmore, 8, and Courtney Cagle, 6.
Their parents are employees of
International Paper's Container Division.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

Just as our bodies need nourishment to make it from childhood through youth to adulthood, our food needs packaging to make it from the farm through the grocery store to our dining tables.

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The abundance of packaging may raise the question: would we be better off without it? The answer: not really. The practical solution is a packaging material that not only fulfills all the requirements of getting food to us but also is ecologically conscious, that is, renewable and recyclable.

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food?

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

Clothes Make the Made Man

When it came time for Richard Vetere to do a little research for his new play, "Gangster Apparel"—which is currently receiving its New York première, under Ethan Silverman's direction, at HERE—he headed back to the Italian section of Queens where he grew up. Hanging out in a neighborhood restaurant with "some likely suspects," the first thing he learned, he says, is that wiseguys never talk about what they do. They will, however, talk about what they wear when they're doing it. "Since my play uses the metaphor of clothing to get at the ways we romanticize the Mafia, I was happy about that," says Vetere (who, in addition to writing poetry and plays, has become one of the busiest screenwriters around). The favored look, he found out, is Bally shoes, an Armani suit, and a silk shirt and undergarments. Jeans and tennis shoes are forbidden; as one of the guys put it, "You never see the Pope or Sinatra in sneaks, do you?" According to another one, though, the key isn't the cut of the clothes but the close crop of the hair. "When I asked him *how* close," Vetere recalls, "he replied, 'Like you're doing eighty miles an hour.' "

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf—Ntozake Shange directs a twentieth-anniversary production of her poetry, prose, and dance work, which examines black womanhood in America. Previews June 22-24. Opens June 25 at 3. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 279-4200.)

Identical Twins from Baltimore—A musical comedy about a svelte black singer and an obese white ballerina—alleged identical twins. In previews through June 24. Opens June 25 at 7. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

Lonely Planet—Steven Dietz's drama deals with the chaos of life in the age of AIDS. Previews begin June 23. (Circle Repertory Company, 159 Bleecker St. 254-6330.)

Lust—From London, a musical version of William Wycherley's "The Country Wife," with Denis Lawson reprising his role as Pinchwife. Previews begin June 23. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

The Play's the Thing—J. Smith-Cameron is a singer, Jay Goede is her composer fiancé, and Peter Frechette is a playwright who tries to keep them together, in Ferenc Molnár's comedy, which, in this adaptation by P. G. Wodehouse, had its Broadway première in 1926. Directed by Gloria Muzio. In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

The School for Wives—The National Asian-American Theatre Company presents Molière's comedy, directed by Stephen Stout. Previews June 21-22. Opens June 23 at 8. (Vineyard, 309 E. 26th St. 683-9772.)

The Springhill Singing Disaster—Karen Trott plays all the roles, and all the guitars, in her comedy about the tribulations of a calamity-ridden folksinger. Norman René directed. Preview on June 21. Opens June 22 at 8. Closes July 2. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

The Tempest—The summer's initial New York Shakespeare Festival production, directed by George C. Wolfe and starring Patrick Stewart as Prospero, employs elements of puppetry, dance, circus spectacle, and African-Carribean music. Bill Irwin and John Pankow are also in the cast, as Trinculo and Stephano. Previews begin June 22. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 861-7277.)

OPENED RECENTLY

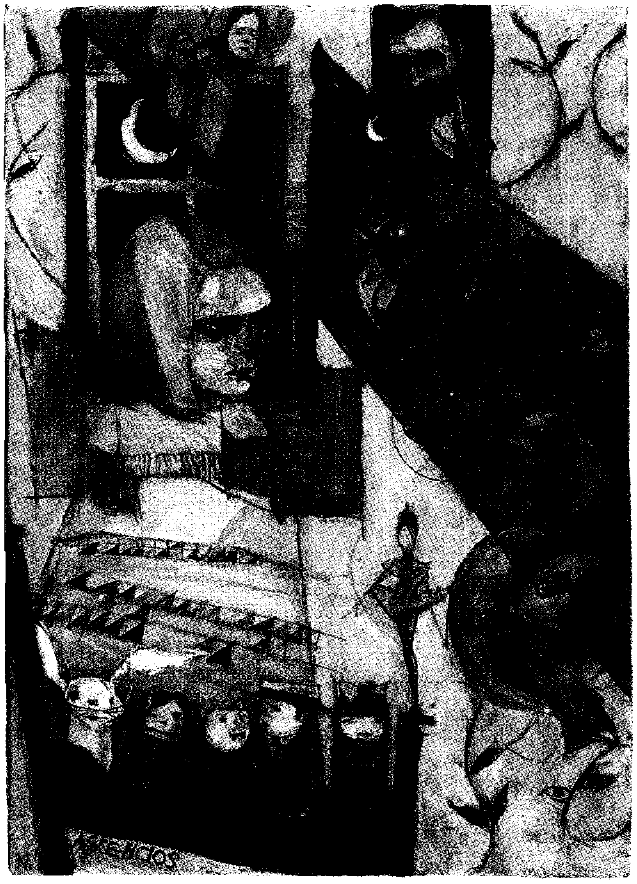
After-Play—Anne Meara's comedy, about two couples who get together for an after-theatre dinner, has moved to a new venue, with Ms. Meara in a starring role, along with Barbara Barrie, Larry Keith, and Merwin Goldsmith. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/13/95.) (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

Arcadia—Despite some casting glitches, the American première of Tom Stoppard's 1993 play, which shuttles between 1809 and the present, is an elegant production of an enormous theatrical feat. In a kind of intellectual mystery story, Stoppard provides the audience with the exhilarating illusion of omniscience, allowing us to solve a riddle of history from clues and connections that the characters, caught in time, do not see. Directed by Trevor Nunn. (4/17/95) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Buttons on Broadway—A two-hour jaunt down memory lane with Red Buttons, who, at seventy-six, has proclaimed himself the oldest living burlesque comic. He's no fossil, though—in this age of irony, his shticky routines are refreshingly funny. When he pulls his hat down over his eyes and sings his trademark "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long," he makes you long for the time when a joke was just a joke. (Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Chronicle of a Death Foretold—Lincoln Center Theatre presents a musical adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Márquez's novel, directed and choreographed by Graciela Daniele. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes July 16.)

Crumbs from the Table of Joy—An African-American widower and his two teen-age daughters move north in 1950 to the promised land of Brooklyn. Ernestine (Kisha Howard), the elder girl, narrates her own coming-of-age story, which reaches a breaking point when her father brings home his new wife—a German emigrant. Playwright Lynn Nottage draws a comic but no less direct bead on the racial politics of the era, capturing its tenor with a Red-scare subplot and blasts of cool bebop from the family's radio. Joe Morton directed. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103. Closes July 1.)



Mischa Barton and Harry Groener, in "Twelve Dreams."

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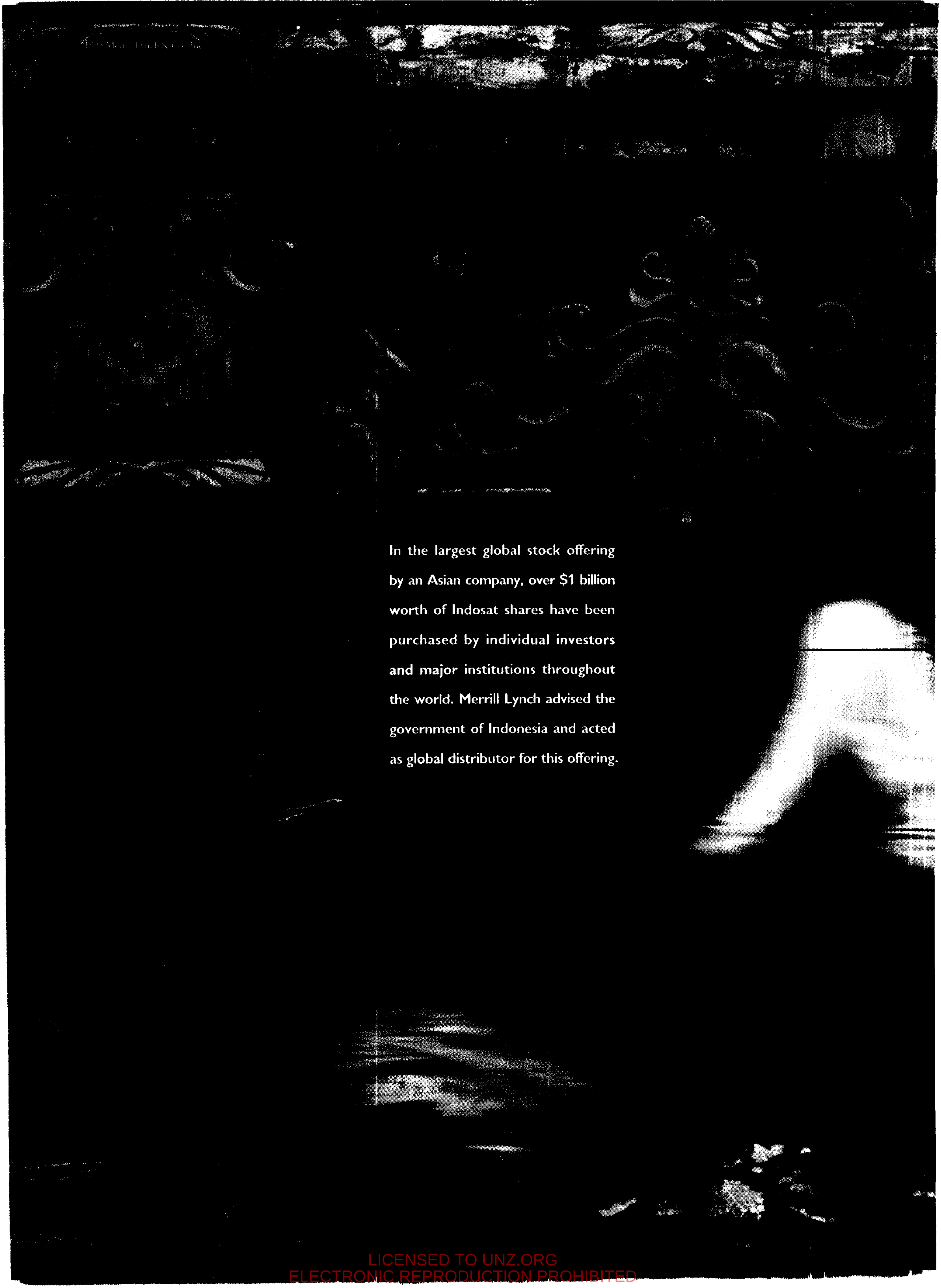

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Death Defying Acts—Three subpar one-act comedies, by David Mamet, Elaine May, and Woody Allen. (3/20/95) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

The Donahue Sisters—In Geraldine Aron's thin comedy-drama, three siblings—a homebody, an addled London housewife, and a jaded New York writer—gather at their family's home in Ireland for some sisterly sniping, a huge joint, and a few snorts of vodka. At the very end they recall a childhood atrocity; the revelation is so sudden and unexpected that when the house lights come up you wonder whether they're going to go back down for another act. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

Fortune's Fools—A sitcom look at modern marriage and relationships, centering on a couple that is headed for the altar (Danton Stone and Dorrie Joiner) and their best man (Tuc Watkins) and maid of honor (Marissa Chibas). The stereotypical characters are likable enough, and the four actors—especially Watkins—bring the flimsy dialogue to life. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

Gangster Apparel—A comedy, by Richard Vetere, about two former mob hit men living under the government's witness-protection program. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes July 1.)

Hamlet—London's Almeida Theatre has brought over a postmodern production whose refusal to risk interpretation reflects Britain's current bland and winded state. Ralph Fiennes seems almost as unwilling to enter the vortex of Hamlet's torment as Hamlet himself is to take action. But his performance is a stylish event; he radiates an elegance of spirit that rivets the audience with its sense of unspoken mystery. Directed by Jonathan Kent. (5/15/95) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Having Our Say—Sadie and Bessie Delany, two sisters who have passed the hundred-year mark, presented their vivid life stories in a 1993 best-seller; the book has been adapted beautifully from the page to the stage by Emily Mann, who also directed. Gloria Foster and Mary Alice are brilliant as the sisters, who were taught by their family to "reach high" despite the dogging of Jim Crow. (4/24/95) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Heiress—A revival of Ruth and Augustus Goetz's 1947 adaptation of Henry James's "Washington Square," directed by Gerald Gutierrez. Cherry Jones, who plays the title character, is exquisitely—almost unbearably—vulnerable. And the wonderful Frances Sternhagen is touching and funny as a widowed aunt. (3/20/95) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying—In this revival of Frank Loesser's 1961 musical, Matthew Broderick has polish and timing, but it's Lillias White's gospel solo in "Brotherhood of Man" that lifts the audience into a zone of joy. As a paradigm for the Broadway musical's con game—winning the public's heart while picking its pocket—her display of guile made glorious is as good as it gets. (4/24/95) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Hundreds of Hats—You can't help but enjoy Michael Mayer's well-crafted revue of songs by the late lyricist Howard Ashman. The mix is funny and unexpectedly poignant—the final numbers are wrenching. Mark Beard's gray, seemingly simple set turns up a number of surprises, and Michael Krass's costumes actually enhance the performances of the five cast members, who sing, dance, and whoop it up with gusto. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes July 2.)

Indiscretions—The brightest spot in this production of Jean Cocteau's "Les Parents Terribles"—a dark comedy about the perversities of desire in family life—is Eileen Atkins, who plays a severely wise spinster with her usual magnetic minimalism. Kathleen Turner, as a hysterically possessive mother, is an unfocussed sprawl with a distractingly unplaceable accent. Roger Rees, Cynthia Nixon, and Jude Law also star, under the direction of Sean Mathias, in this import from London's Royal National Theatre. (5/15/95) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

J. P. Morgan Saves the Nation—En Garde Arts' new site-specific musical, about the famous financier, is being staged on the steps of Federal Hall. The intersection of Wall and Broad Streets is closed Tuesday through Sunday evenings for the performances. (279-4200. Closes July 16.)

John & Jen—Andrew Lippa and Tom Greenwald's "musical that grows up before your eyes" spans a forty-year period, starting in 1951, and explores problems of love and family through the relationships of a sister and a brother and, later on, the sister and her son. The book is often hackneyed and the music repetitive, though the lyrics to the songs ("Christmas," "Little League," "Graduation") possess an honest charm. Well staged by Gabriel Barre, and acted with great verve by James Ludwig and Carolee Carmello. Stuart Duke provided the deft lighting. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

Lady-Like—Laura Shamas's drama about the love affair between Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who fled Ireland in 1778 to live together in Wales. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 741-6436.)

London Suite—Neil Simon knows how to cater to his audience, but he's serving leftovers: these four one-acts are painfully dated in both their substance and their execution. The main pleasure in this production is Carole Shelley, who provides some much needed comic muscle tone. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!—The eight gay men in Terrence McNally's beautifully written drama connect in ways that almost any nuclear family would envy. Under the nimble direction of Joe Mantello, the actors present humbling evidence of what love is and can be. (11/14/94) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

One Woman Shoe—The brother-and-sister writing team of David and Amy Sedaris bill themselves as the Talent Family, and it's a rare case of truth in advertising. In this encore production of their hilariously absurd show, three women who embody all possible facets of cluelessness are told by their social-services caseworker (played to Franklin Pangbornian perfection by David Rakoff) that they must put on one-woman shows in order to keep their benefit checks coming. The five cast members are all funny in a number of roles, but Ms. Sedaris, with her chipmunk's overbite and her remarkably plastic face, is extraordinary—she burns her way into your memory with a comic branding iron. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me . . .—Dan Butler offers a procession of characters from the real world of contemporary gay culture, moving seamlessly from one monologue to the next in a one-man show that is by turns hilarious, infuriating, sad, and uplifting—a charmer. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 307-4100.)

Party—Seven gay men get together to play a strip version of truth or dare, with terrifically funny (if occasionally didactic) results. The characters in David Dillon's comedy are stereotypes, more or less, but the solid cast makes them believable, and in the end you've had a look at some enduring friendships (and some nice bodies). (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.)

Prisoner of Love—An adaptation of Jean Genet's last book—a meditation on the fate of the Palestinians—in which Ruth Maleczech, bundled up in black like a babushka, wanders the stage delivering gnomic utterances

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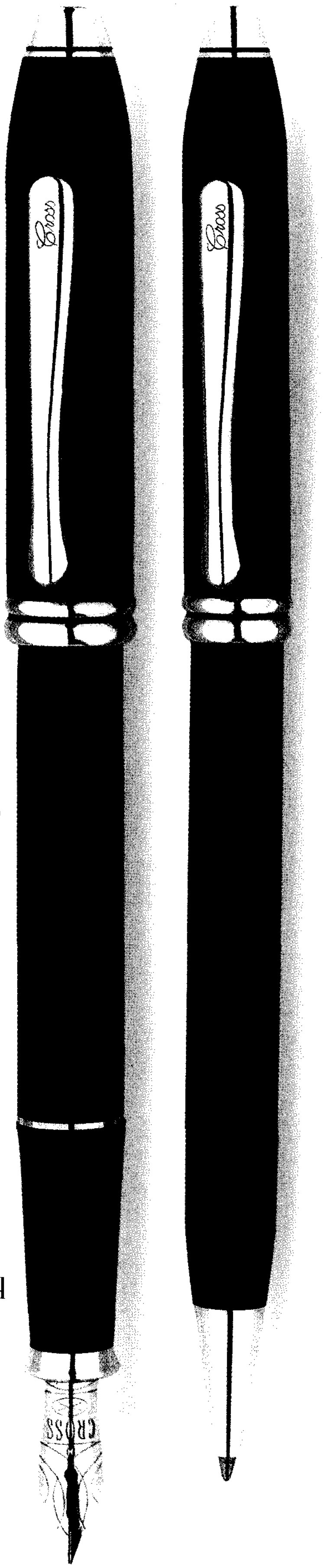

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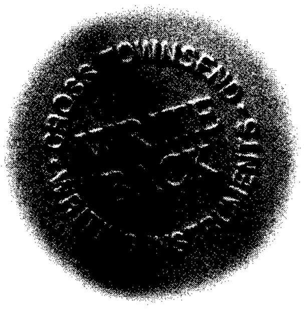

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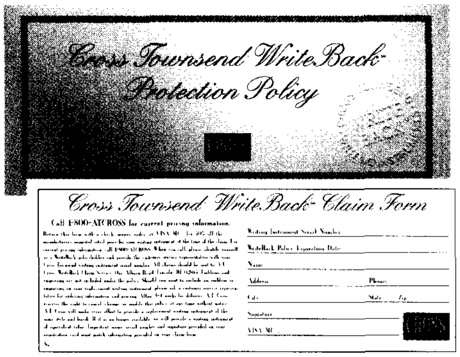

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over Philip Glass's snake-charmer saxophone music. The adaptation is by Maleczech, Chiori Miyagawa, and JoAnne Akalaitis, *who also directed; they have packed a lot of* opacity into an hour and a quarter. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 302-6989. Closes June 25.)

The Radical Mystique—Arthur Laurents' new play, set in 1969 in the tasteful Greenwich Village brownstone of an upper-middle-class couple, is a kind of greatest-hits collection of themes, conveniently packaged to call up the era of promise and hypocrisy. The checklist includes white liberals throwing parties for the Black Panthers, as well as Stonewall, sexual liberation, J. Edgar Hoover, radicals blowing up town houses, racial identity, the Kennedys—everything except the moon landing. There are good performances by Mary Beth Fisher and Jake Weber (who plays an F.B.I. agent—a closeted homosexual, of course). Mr. Laurents directed. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 2.)

The Kirov Ballet in "Les Saisons Russes," at the Met.

ALICIA CZECHOWSKI

Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman—A hundred-minute standup routine. Some of Becker's examples of discontent between the sexes are very funny (a lot of vigorous nodding goes on in the theatre—never by men and women at the same time), but a fair number of them are shopworn. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

The Rose Tattoo—Tennessee Williams's paean to sexual passion—he called it his "love-play to the world." As the central character, the alternately pious and hot-blooded Serafina, Mercedes Ruehl is funny and affecting, and Anthony LaPaglia brings a sweet openness to the role of the young man who puts the bloom back in her cheeks. Robert Falls directed. (5/15/95) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes July 2.)

Sam's Tormented Angels—The Swedish troupe Teater Albatross presents a collective work inspired by Allen Ginsberg's elegy for his mother, "Kaddish." Through June 25. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

Simpson Street—Eduardo Gallardo's claustrophobic South Bronx family drama is stuffed with every conceivable cliché. Even Iraida Polanco's vivid performance as a sex-crazed neighbor doesn't make the evening more than intermittently interesting. Saturday and Sunday performances are in Spanish; a lot of the jokes in the English version are in Spanish, too. (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 354-1293. Closes July 2.)

Smokey Joe's Café—The Songs of Leiber and Stoller—A feast of early rock and roll, performed by a cast with Grade A lungs and legs. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Sunset Boulevard—Glenn Close continues her triumphant run as Norma Desmond through July 2; Betty Buckley assumes the role on July 4. (12/5/94) (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007.)

Sylvia—In A. R. Gurney's new comedy, Sarah Jessica Parker, as a dog named Sylvia (who says there aren't roles for women?), brings meaning to the life of a middle-aged currency trader (Charles Kimbrough) while driving a canine-shaped wedge between him and his wife (Blythe Danner). Parker has some funny moments: you should hear what she says when she sees a cat, and her attempt to mate with a matronly guest (Derek Smith, in a good drag turn) is hilarious. But this upper-middle-class fairy tale settles too soon into a monotonous sweetness; it lacks bite. John Tillinger directed. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Travels with My Aunt—Giles Havergal, directing his own witty adaptation of Graham Greene's novel, has captured the book's amusingly puzzled tone with his playful, inventive (though overlong) staging. Four wildly different actors all play Henry Pulling, the staid retired banker whose eccentric Aunt Augusta drags him into her international adventures. Jim Dale doubles as Aunt Augusta, and the other three skillfully handle some twenty additional parts. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 420-8000.)

Twelve Dreams—James Lapine wrote and directed this drama, inspired by a case study from Carl Jung's "Man and His Symbols." (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Word of Mouth—James Lecesne's remarkably varied solo show: eight characters, eight voices, and (you'd swear) eight bodies. In general, the technique is more startling than the material. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP / TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JELLY ROLL!:** Kaufman, 534 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **THREE TALL WOMEN:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Final performances of the spring season. June 21-23 at 8, June 24 at 2 and 8, and June 25 at 1 and 7: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Kirov Ballet—The St. Petersburg company bookends its two-week engagement with "Les Saisons Russes," a program of three works choreographed by Mikhail Fokine eight decades ago for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The dances have been reconstructed by Andris Liepa, a principal dancer with the Kirov, and by Isabel Fokine, the choreographer's granddaughter; they relied, Ms. Fokine says, on contemporary descriptions and films, her grandfather's idiosyncratic dance notations, and her memories of an earlier reconstruction by her father, the ballet master Vitale Fokine, on which she assisted. She also consulted a cache of correspondence between her grandfather and Stanislavski, in which the two men discussed stage simplicity and naturalism. "My grandfather loved the soft, broken line, as opposed to the elongated and stiff," she explains. He wanted dancers to focus less on their pirouettes than on their characters—a lesson that hasn't lost its relevance today: "Dancers," she says with a laugh, "are concerned about technique and how many calories are in a particular piece of food." June 21 at 2 and 8, and June 29-30 at 8: "Les Saisons Russes." . . . ¶ June 22-23 at 8, and June 24 and July 1 at 2 and 8: "Swan Lake." . . . ¶ June 26-27 at 8 and June 28 at 2 and 8: "Cinderella." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

Philadanco—The Philadelphia dance company in two programs, both of which include an excerpt from "Pretty Is Skin Deep, Ugly to the Bone," set to music by Earth, Wind & Fire, and "BAMM," a new work by Donald Byrd. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. June 21-23 at 8, June 24 at 2 and 8, and June 25 at 2 and 7:30.)

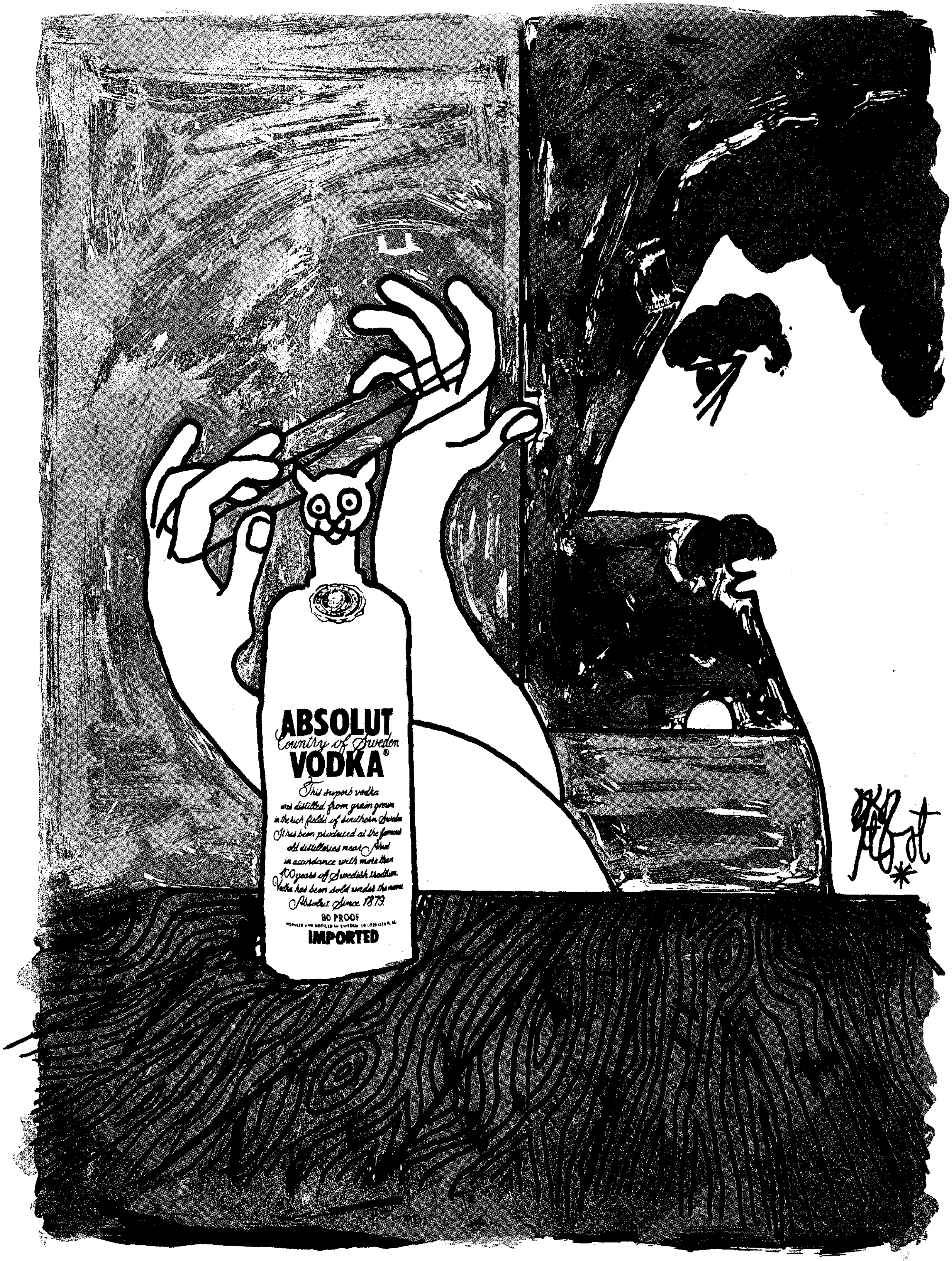
"Excavations"—Choreographer Martita Goshen dances with the eight other members of her company in the première of an evening-length work. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. June 22-25 at 8:30.)

"Love Songs for the End of the Century"—Andrew Jannetti & Dancers, in six works about love and relationships, including "Puddle Bumps," "Fallen Angel," and "Isolation." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. June 22-24 at 8 and June 25 at 3.)

"Homemade"—Choreographers Rosane Chamecki *and Andrea Lerner—both natives of* Curitiba, Brazil—collaborate with dancer Cristina Latici, filmmaker Lorenzo Shapiro, composer Anthony Fine, and artist Bas Bremer, in an evening-length piece about the meaning of home. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. June 22-25 at 9.)

Javanese Dance—Muryanto, a dancer specializing in the strong-male (*gagah*) style of Central Java, performs with the New York Indonesian Consulate's gamelan orchestra. (Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, 5 E. 68th St. June 24 at 8. For information, call 287-4796.)

"GhettOriginal"—A team of hip-hop dancers, former members of Rock Steady Crew and the Rhythm Technicians, present a blend of group moves and individual styles from the hip-hop and club scenes. (P.S. 122. 477-5288. June 29-30 at 9 and July 1 at 4 and 9.)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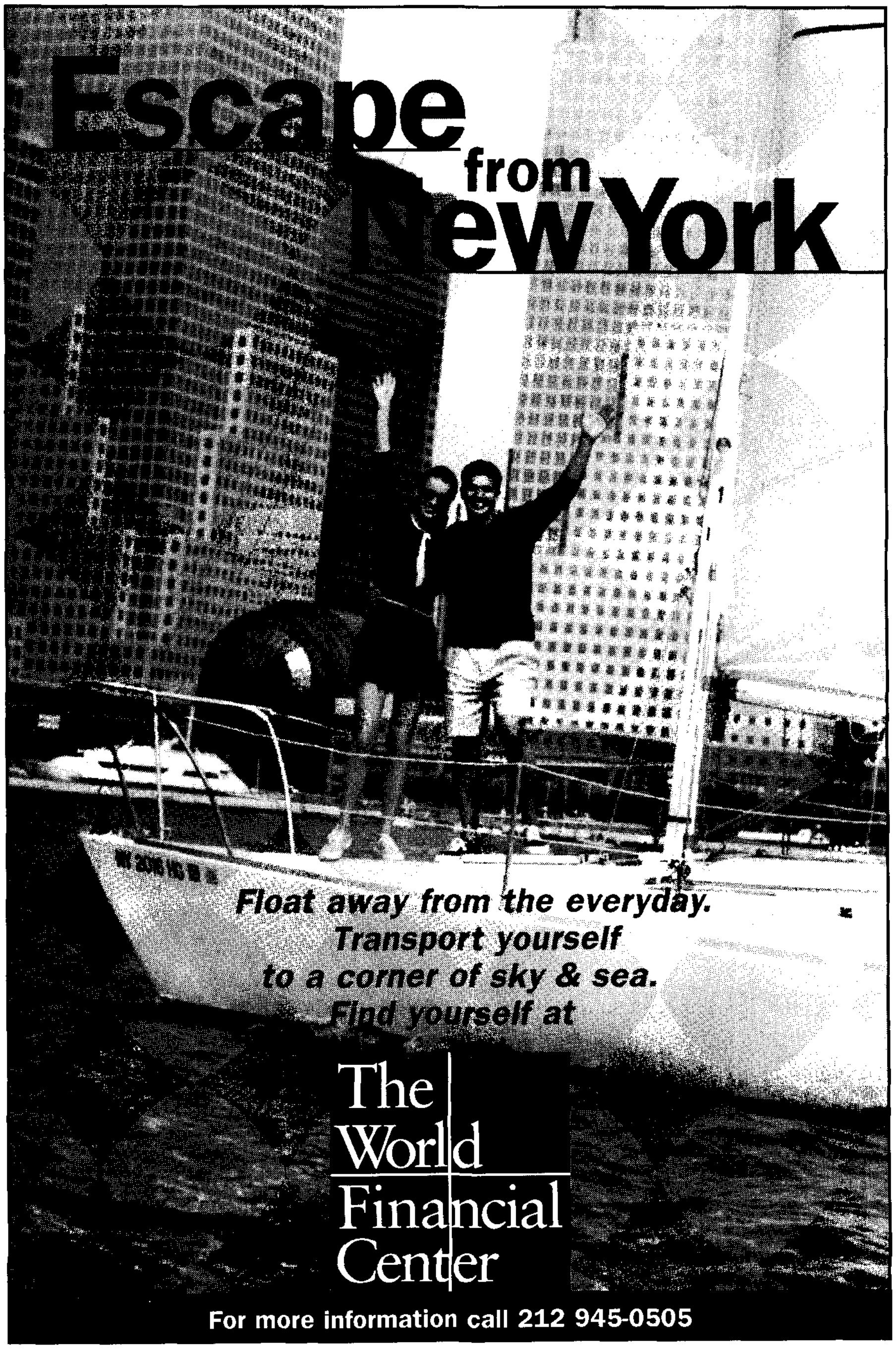
NIGHT LIFE

From Murmur to Monster

MOST rock-and-roll acts die before they get old, but R.E.M.'s decade-and-a-half rise from the tiny college dives of Athens, Georgia, to arenas like Madison Square Garden—where the band will perform June 22-24—hasn't shaken its psychic balance. (The tour was postponed last March, after Bill Berry suffered a brain aneurysm; the drummer has recovered fully.) Guitarist Peter Buck, bassist Mike Mills, and Berry come across as brilliant but basically straightforward guys—no ego problems there. The real secret of R.E.M.'s artistic health, though, lies in the elliptical imagination of Michael Stipe. He's an unlikely icon, a quirky amalgam of David Byrne's skittishness, James Dean's boyishness, and Truman Capote's fey grandiosity. His early vocals were a blur of mumbles and slurred words, but as his singing grew clearer, so did the grace of his found phrases and his stream-of-consciousness imagery. Stipe's eccentricity is one of the reasons R.E.M. was pegged as an alternative act. The title of the band's latest album, "Monster," seems to refer, at least in part, to the outsize stature the group must now cope with. Still, when Stipe sings "I'm not commodity" over and over (on "King of Comedy"), it doesn't sound defensive or ironic. It sounds like he's proud.



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CONCERTS

JVC Jazz Festival—It's spring, and the gang—Mel, Ray, Oscar, and Peggy—is back in town. Old reliables aside, a series of free concerts in Bryant Park will focus on young neo-cons; everything left of center has been banished downtown (see the Knitting Factory). June 23 at 8: **JOE HENDERSON** and **JOSHUA REDMAN.** Two tenors, one the reigning master, the other the young contender. Henderson has been known to coast and Redman to grandstand; together, they should balance out nicely. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.) . . . ¶ June 23-24 at 8: **RAY CHARLES** and **MACEO PARKER.** His act can be as codified and brief as a visit to the shrink, but it's still Ray Charles. Saxman Parker is a personal friend of James Brown's. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.) . . . ¶ June 24 at 8: **MEL TORME** and **PEGGY LEE.** (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ June 25 at 3: The lascivious, metaphysically funky **OHIO PLAYERS.** It's not exactly jazz, but hey, who cares? (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.) . . . At 8: "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" night—a salute to Johnny Mercer and Emma Kelly, "the Lady of 6,000 Songs," hosted by author John Berendt, with **BOBBY SHORT** and **MARGARET WHITING.** (Avery Fisher Hall.) . . . ¶ June 27 at 8: **OSCAR PETERSON.** The keyboard wizard has recuperated from a stroke, and as his latest recording, "The More I See You," proves, he's still capable of summoning up the rampaging spirit of Art Tatum. (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ June 28 at 8: Brazilian jazz with **GAL COSTA.** (Carnegie Hall.) . . . Also at 8: **ILLINOIS JACQUET** and friends. (Avery Fisher Hall.) . . . ¶ June 29 at 12:30: Pianist **MARCUS ROBERTS** will appear with his trio, and with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, in Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." Paging Woody Allen. (Bryant Park.) . . . ¶ June 29-30 at 8: Elastic singer **AL JARREAU,** with **ZAP MAMA,** an all-female Belgian-African a-cappella quintet that uses a variety of languages to create dense, richly textured melodies and hypnotic polyrhythms. (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ June 30 at 12:30: **WESSELL ANDERSON, CARL ALLEN, GARY BARTZ, CYRUS CHESTNUT,** and **JAMES CARTER.** The Young Turks in full force—for free. Not to be missed. (Bryant Park.) . . . At 8: "Battle of the Bands"—the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (headed by **WYNTON MARSALIS**) vs. the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band (headed by **JON FADDIS**). The city's two mightiest repertory big bands are just about neck and neck in terms of precision, enthusiasm, and soloists. But a little competition never hurts. Take Wynton and the point spread. (Avery Fisher Hall.) . . . ¶ July 1 at 12:30: The dashing trumpeter **MARCUS PRINTUP** leads another ensemble of polished youngsters. With **CHARLIE HUNTER,** a guitarist who used to rap with the Disposable Heros of Hiphoprisy. (Bryant Park.) . . . At 8: Latin jazz, with **CELIA CRUZ, OSCAR DE LEON,** and **INDIA.** (Carnegie Hall.) Whew!

Irma Thomas—Aretha Franklin has the name and Etta James has the legend, but Irma Thomas has the goods. The finest R. & B. diva in the land has only grown in power and artistry since she recorded the original version of "Time Is on My Side," in the early sixties. A workhorse from the old school, she traffics in transcendence—routinely. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. For information, call 1-718 855-7882. June 22 at 7.)

R.E.M.—With Luscious Jackson. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 22-24 at 8.)

Billy Ray Cyrus—Westbury Music Fair. 1-516 334-0800. June 24 at 8.

Hezekiah Walker & the Love Fellowship Crusade Choir / Fontella Bass—A gospel-o-rama. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 24 at 3.)

Melissa Etheridge—Her latest album, "Yes I Am," is probably her best, and she does the arena-rousing thing with verve and conviction, giving girls and boys alike a reason to shout. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. June 27 at 8.)

Phish—Grateful Dead lite. (Jones Beach Theatre. June 28-29 at 8.)

Van Morrison—The last time Van the Man played New York, he left the stage after about

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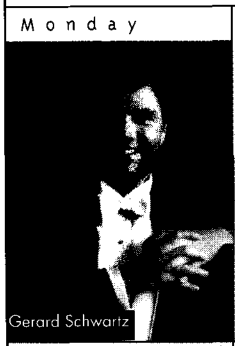 Gerard Schwartz	25 July	26 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **ALICIA DE LARROCHA, piano** **GIL SHAHAM, violin** Handel: Water Music Mozart: Piano Concerto No.27 in B-flat, K.595 Mendelssohn: Scherzo from Octet in E-flat Kreisler: Violin Concerto in the style of Vivaldi Mozart: Symphony No. 39 in E-flat, K.543 **Tickets: $40/$30/$20** **Pre-concert July 26 at 7pm**	27 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **INGRID HAEBLER, piano** ✱ **GÜHER PEKINEL, piano** ✱ **SÜHER PEKINEL, piano** ✱ **LISITSA & KUZNETSOFF, pianos**✱ **ALEXANDER KORSANTIYA, piano** ✱ All-Mozart Program: Concerto No.17 in G, K.453 Concerto No.10 in E-flat for Two Pianos Concerto No.7 in F for Three Pianos **Tickets: $35/$25/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	28	29 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **RICHARD STOLTZMAN, clarinet** **JANE EAGLEN, soprano** ✱ Mayr: Overture and Scene from Medea in Corinto Mozart: Clarinet Concerto in A, K.622 Beethoven: Ah, perfido! Mozart: Symphony No.38 in D, K.504 ("Prague") **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**
31 **EMERSON STRING QUARTET** **YEFIM BRONFMAN, piano** Haydn: Quartet in b, Op.33 No.1 Beethoven: Quartet in f, Op.95 ("Serioso") Brahms: Piano Quintet in f **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	1 August	2 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **ITZHAK PERLMAN, violin** Mendelssohn: The Hebrides Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto in e Stravinsky: Pulcinella **Wendy Hoffman, mezzo-soprano** **Stanford Olsen, tenor** **Jan Opalach, bass** **Tickets: $40/$30/$20** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	3 **TAFELMUSIK** **JEANNE LAMON, Director** MUSIC ON PERIOD INSTRUMENTS Handel: Suite in G Bach: Violin Concerto in a Albinoni: Concerto for Two Oboes Vivaldi: Concerto for Four Violins, Op.3 No.1 Telemann: Suite Tafelmusik, Book III **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	4	5 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **PETER MAAG, conductor** **YURI BASHMET, viola** **MAXIM VENGEROV, violin** **CECILE OUSSET, piano** ✱ Tritto: Overture to Il convitato di pietra Mozart: Piano Concerto No.21 in C, K.467 Mozart: Sinfonia concertante for Violin and Viola, K.364 Mozart: Symphony No.35 in D, K.385 ("Haffner") **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**
7 **CANADIAN BRASS** **STAR OF INDIANA Brass and Percussion Corps** Bach: Toccata and Fugue in d Britten: The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra Barber: Adagio Gabrieli: Antiphonal Canzona and works by Handel, Purcell Copland, Gershwin and Ellington **Tickets: $35/$25/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	8 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **EUGENE ISTOMIN, piano** All Mozart Program Overture to the Marriage of Figaro Two Piano Concertos: No. 14 in E-flat, K.449 No. 24 in c, K491 Symphony No.40 in g **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	9 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **DUBRAVKA TOMSIC, piano** ✱ Haydn: Symphony No.44 in e ("Trauer") Mozart: Piano Concerto No.19 in F, K.459 Mozart: Symphony No.40 in g **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	10 **ANDRE WATTS, piano** **THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER** DAVID SHIFRIN, Artistic Director **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **CARLOS KALMAR, conductor** ✱ Mozart: Quintet in E-flat for Piano and Winds, K.452 Janacek: Concertino for Winds, Strings and Piano Beethoven: Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat ("Emperor") **Tickets: $35/$25/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	11 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **CARLOS KALMAR, conductor** **ANDRE WATTS, piano** **MILAN TURKOVIC, bassoon** Mozart: Serenata Notturna in D M.Haydn: Concertino for Bassoon Weber: Bassoon Concerto in F, Op.75 Beethoven: Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat ("Emperor") **Tickets: $35/$25/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	12 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **CARLOS KALMAR, conductor** **EROICA TRIO** ✱ Adela Peña, violin Sara Sant'ambrogio, cello Erika Nickrenz, piano Mozart: Serenata Notturna in D Beethoven: Concerto in C for Violin, Cello, and Piano ("Triple Concerto") Mozart: Symphony No.41 in C ("Jupiter") **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**
14 **ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS** **SIR NEVILLE MARRINER, conductor** **TILL FELLNER, piano** ✱ Beethoven: Leonore Overture No.3 Mozart: Piano Concerto No 9 in E-flat, K.271 Beethoven: Symphony No.7 in A **Tickets: $40/$30/$20** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	15 **ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS** **SIR NEVILLE MARRINER, conductor** **IMOGEN COOPER, piano** All-Beethoven Program: Symphony No.1 in C Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat Symphony No.5 in c **Tickets: $40/$30/$20** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	16 **ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET** ✱ **JON KIMURA PARKER, piano** **TIMOTHY COBB, bass** Mozart: Quartet in C, K.157 Mendelssohn: Quartet in E-flat, Op.12 Schubert: Piano Quintet in A ("Trout") **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	17 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **ALESSANDRA MARC, soprano** **JANOS STARKER, cello** Mozart: Symphony in D, K.297 ("Paris") Mozart and Handel Arias Haydn: Cello Concerto in D Cherubini: Symphony in D **Tickets: $28/$20/$15** **Pre-concert at 7pm**	18	19 **MOSTLY MOZART ORCHESTRA** **GERARD SCHWARZ, conductor** **PETER SERKIN, piano** **JANET WILLIAMS, soprano** **NATHALIE STUTZMANN, contralto** ✱ **HIROYUKI YOSHIDA, tenor** ✱ **WILLIAM STONE, bass** ✱ **PRO ARTE CHORALE** **Bart Folse, director** Mozart: Symphony No.1 in E-flat Beethoven: Fantasia in c for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra ("Choral Fantasy") Mozart: Requiem in d, K.626 **Tickets: $40/$30/$20** **Pre-concert at 7pm**

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forty minutes—only to return for half a dozen encores. Like Bob Dylan or Al Green, the Irish troubadour has always been an unpredictable performer; but as anyone who's seen him at his best will admit, he's worth the gamble. Besides, this time around he has an excellent new album, "Days Like This," and a great live band. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. June 30 at 8. . . . ¶ Jones Beach Theatre. July 1 at 8.)

Yanni—With steamy titles like "Swept Away," "Until the Last Moment," and "Reflections of Passion," it's easy to see why this hirsute composer-keyboardist has become the Barbara Cartland of pop music. In the grand tradition of Liberace and Richard Clayderman, he plays music to swoon to. And he does it very, *very* well—his 1994 "Live at the Acropolis" CD and video sold so many copies that his arch-rival, John Tesh, was forced to respond with his own ungodly extravaganza. (Jones Beach Theatre. June 30 at 8.)

Joan Osborne—Her recent CD, "Relish," should have made her a household name—she has one of the most distinctive new voices in rock. With Ani DiFranco, another fine young singer-songwriter. (Central Park SummerStage. July 1 at 3.)

The Right Reverend Daddy Love & the Disciples—Featuring Corey Glover, formerly of Living Colour. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. July 1 at 3.)

Cassandra Wilson—The preëminent young female jazz singer. (Central Park SummerStage. July 2 at 3.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Through June 21: two "outrageous" evenings with **HARVEY FIERSTEIN.** June 26: **JOHNNIE JOHNSON,** Chuck Berry's legendary pianist. June 27: Blues god **TAJ MAHAL** grabs a handful of strings June 30-July 1.

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel dungeon deep in the heart of the meat district. Tuesday nights are given over to experimental d.j. spinoffs.

Downtime, 251 W. 30th St. (695-2747)—A friendly split-level bar with a dazzling quasi-Cubist paint job and an above-average pool table.

Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **DRESSING ROOM DIVAS** are in the house every Friday night.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. June 24: Guitarist **RICHARD LLOYD,** formerly of Television. The **CANDY BUTCHERS** take over on June 27. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Flannery's, 205 W. 14th St. (929-9589)—A well-scrubbed, amiable Irish pub with many of the classic features (pints of Guinness, nonstop TV sports) and a few of the near-classics (a CD jukebox, a portrait of Elvis).

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—This sprawling two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. June 20: Performance-art veteran **KAREN FINLEY.** June 21: **GUIDED BY VOICES,** a ragtag outfit from Dayton, Ohio, whose ringleader, Robert Pollard, recently quit his job as a fourth-grade teacher. The band's 1994 release, "Bee Thousand," was a playground of vérité chaos that had mature, sane people walking around humming songs like "The Goldheart Mountaintop Queen Directory." With **CHRIS KNOX** (see the Mercury Lounge). . . . ¶ Soul Kitchen, the original seventies funk and R. & B. party, goes down (late) every Tuesday. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Kaptain Banana, 101 Greene St. (343-9000)—French cabaret *en travesti* in SoHo. Three drag queens and eight dancers re-create the Court of Versailles, a carnival in Rio, Marlene Dietrich, and the Andrews Sisters. There's also a singing gorilla. Dining.

Limelight, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—A church turned eighties hot spot, this unholy venue currently plays host to a variety of techno and alternative acts. Wednesday night is Disco 2000.

Ludlow Street Café, 165 Ludlow St. (353-0536)—An unassuming basement restaurant-bar, where you can drink cheap and catch live music nightly. Mondays belong to **BEAT RODEO,** a straight-shooting bar band that plays a mixture of country, blues, Dylan, Byrds, Velvets, and various pop curiosities.

Match, 160 Mercer St. (343-0020)—This hip SoHo *boîte* is the place to be every Sunday night, thanks to the **SHORTY JACKSON LEGACY BLUES BAND.** Dining.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Past the long bar, you'll find an exposed-brick room and a stage packed with some very hip rock acts. June 21: **MR. HONEY.** June 23: **LIDA HUSIK** and **CHRIS KNOX.** Husik is a thoughtful rocker who pines for tenderness in a cool, cynical age. Steeped in the Stones and the Velvet Underground, she spins out impressionistic lyrics, delivering them, like Liz Phair, in a sultry alto offset with a coquettish falsetto. A seminal figure in the Australian punk scene of the past decade, Knox has mellowed into a tuneful, whimsical iconoclast. June 25: **LORI CARSON.** A part-time member of the eighties art-rock collective known as the Golden Palominos, this guitarist-vocalist, who has just released her second solo album, presents a world where the only sure thing is heartbreak. In lesser hands, her work could be a bummer, but Carson's passion and skill balance out her longing. Accompanied by little more than sparse guitar and haunting harmonies, her singing is artful, pretty, and perfect for the midnight hour. June 27: **THE PROFESSOR AND MARYANN.** July 4: Former dB **PETER HOLSAPPLE.**

Michael Stipe of R.E.M., at Madison Square Garden.

Monkey Bar, 60 E. 54th St. (838-2600)—Beyond the monkey murals, there's a bright see-and-be-seen dining arena that's perfect for committing high-profile indiscretions in a strapless gown. But the place to be is the dark and crowded bar up front, by the grand piano, where the bar stools look like stuffed olives. You perch on the pimiento. Dining.

Nell's, 246 W. 14th St. (675-1567)—A Victorian-style club, home to an eclectic crowd of downtown youngsters dancing to throbbing funk, techno-pop, and, sometimes, jazz.

Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, 519 Second Ave., at 29th St. (686-1210)—**BLACK 47** plays on Saturdays, and Speir Mor (Gaelic for Big Sky) performs for a hearty following on Fridays. Séisiún—a traditional Irish jam—is on Thursday nights.

Les Poulets, 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and, now and then, a cha-cha. Dining.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Dining.

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PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

TRAMPS, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—This spacious and agreeable club offers a consistent lineup of blues greats. June 22: The amazing cheekbones of **CHARLIE SEXTON.** June 23-24: Rounder Records celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, with **MARCIA BALL, BEAU JOCQUE,** and **STEVE RILEY** (on June 23), and **IRMA THOMAS** (see Concerts) and **TRACY NELSON** (on June 24). June 28: The **AFGHAN WHIGS.**

WEBSTER HALL, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Wednesday is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—June 24: The **ROBBY KRIEGER** band. Back in the late sixties, Joan Didion had this to say about the guitarist's old group: "The Doors' music insisted that love was sex and sex was death and therein lay salvation." Of course, that was many years ago, and Jim Morrison, as we all know, is still suffering from death. Krieger's not quite as spry as he used to be, either, but the spirit of the Doors hovers over the proceedings, and for old fans, that just may be enough.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through June 21: **MICHAEL FEINSTEIN.** Songwriter **JIMMY WEBB** settles in for a month on June 27. Dining.

ARTHUR'S TAVERN, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through June 25: the **MODERN JAZZ QUARTET.** Connie Kay, the M.J.Q.'s quietly brilliant drummer, died last winter, after nearly forty years with the band. Poised behind vibraharpist Milt Jackson, pianist John Lewis, and bassist Percy Heath, Kay was the quintessential foot soldier: he wasn't flashy, just perfect. Fortunately, the group has decided to carry on. Kay's replacement is Albert (Tootie) Heath—the bassist's brother. Like Kay, he has a gorgeous touch and the ability to swing at low volume. The sleek and spirited guitarist **KENNY BURRELL** (June 27-July 2) doesn't often feature horns in his bands, but this time he's joined by trombonist Steve Turré, trumpeter Jimmy Owens, and Jerome Richardson on reeds. Dining.

BRADLEY'S, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—On any given night, and well into the morning, one or another of New York's many formidable pianists can be found here. Intense, inventive, and garrulous **JOHN HICKS** (in through June 24) combines the harmonic daring and aggressive stance of McCoy Tyner with the romantic fluency of Roland Hanna—not a bad mix. June 25: The **BRUCE BARTH** trio. June 26-July 1: The **JAMES WILLIAMS** trio. Dining.

CAJUN, 129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (691-6174)—A New Orleans-style restaurant specializing in Dixieland and swing. On Fridays, catch the Canal Street Dixieland Jazz and Blues band. Saturdays belong to the New Atlantic Jazz band.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June 24, the great **BOBBY SHORT.** Time has not diminished the tasteful virtuosity of Short's ivory-tinkling, nor has it taken the edge off his gregarious wit as a singer and showman. A fixture at the Carlyle, he can still spin an Ira Gershwin lyric with all the sophistication, humor, and pathos it deserves. Also well served are gems by Duke Ellington, Dorothy Fields, Irving Berlin, and, of course, Cole Porter. A de-lightful, de-lovely evening.

FAT TUESDAY'S, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—Through June 25: the **DICK HYMAN** trio, with Howard Alden and Bob Haggard. The spirit of the streamlined and eloquent Nat Cole trio awakens when these guys get together—everything they play is clever and swinging. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Dining.

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Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A cool, sumptuous piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel, with twenty-two-foot-high ceilings, a long backlit bar stocked with single-malt Scotch, and fine jazz seven nights a week. Wednesdays through Saturdays, **DONALD JOHNSTON** is the featured pianist. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Across the street from Lincoln Center, this restaurant and club features a handsome bar upstairs and a surreal performance space downstairs. June 20-24: The **BENNY CARTER** quartet. Carter is just plain scary. At eighty-seven, he's still in fighting shape, and his alto ripples with the precision and grace that have been his signature for seven decades. There's not a shred of sentimentality in his presentation; his sound is made up of a lifetime of knowledge and taste. June 27-July 2: The **DON BYRON** sextet.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Brass rails, vintage posters, Hirschfeld drawings, and a piano. June 21-24: Piano and bass with **JOHN BUNCH** and **PHIL FLANIGAN.** June 28-July 1: **ROY GERSON** and **PAT O'LEARY.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—"What Is Jazz?," the Knit's every-which-way-but-neocon festival, continues. Here are some hipster highlights. June 21: The bluesy **HOLMES BROTHERS** with guest **DEWEY REDMAN.** June 23: Chicago's avant-leaning **8 BOLD SOULS** and a summit meeting of **ARCHIE SHEPP, RICHARD DAVIS,** and **JAKI BYARD.** Downstairs in the Tap Bar: a **MARTY EHRLICH** and **BOBBY PREVITE** duet. June 24: Avant heavyweight **HENRY THREADGILL.** June 25: The **HAMIET BLUIETT** trio. Defying the conventional range of the baritone saxophone, this sometime member of the World Saxophone Quartet can coax unnatural but beautiful sounds from his cumbersome instrument. Whether croaking like a bullfrog or screaming like a siren, he grounds his explorations in the bedrock of blues and gospel. June 27: **JACKY TERRASSON.** The defiantly eccentric pianist continually walks the line between daring jaunts of imagination and isn't-this-just-shocking mannerisms. Youthful mischief aside, he is definitely a comer.

Le Madeleine, 403 W. 43rd St. (246-2993)—Every Sunday evening, guitar great **GENE BERTONCINI** lights up this cozy Hell's Kitchen bistro with his simmering melodicism and chordal grace.

Metropolis, 31 Union Sq. W. (675-2300)—The basement of this swank café is now hosting a series of high-profile gigs. June 23-25: The **ELVIN JONES** jazz machine. Jones has lost none of his explosive energy or astonishing ability to move the beat in a thousand directions at once. Tuesdays are given over to the **GEORGE GEE ORCHESTRA,** a seventeen-piece swing band.

Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—On Mondays, Woody Allen continues his night job as clarinet player in the **NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL AND RAGTIME ORCHESTRA,** a Dixieland-jazz ensemble. Closed Sundays.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. **PHYLICIA RASHAD** continues through June 24. **ANITA O'DAY** begins a two-week run on June 27. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Michael Andrew and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Red Blazer Too, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—Thursdays belong to Stan Rubin's big band, Fridays to Lew Anderson's big band and the Kit McClure sextet, and Saturdays to Bob Cantwell and his Stompers.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—A new contender in New York's ever-changing jazz topography, this aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night.

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—July 2: Sultry singer **HELEN SCHNEIDER,** with the Count Basie orchestra.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A jazz outpost where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through June 25: the **JAVON JACKSON** quartet. Jackson, a fluid and intelligent tenor saxophonist and an impressive fledgling hard-bopper, is on a roll: his "When the Time Is Right" was one of last year's keepers. June 27-July 2: The **CHARNETT MOFFETT** trio. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter **MILES EVANS** is in action on Mondays. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The world's most famous jazz club is also the last place in town that still looks, smells, and feels like a classic jazz club—subterranean, smoky, and thick with the spirits of past masters. Through June 25: the **DAVID MURRAY** quartet. The great hope of the eighties is still a contender, and he's still capable of toppling buildings with his galvanic tenor-sax work. June 27-July 2: The **ROY HARGROVE** sextet. Feisty, historically aware, and blessed with a brassy, ringing tone, this trumpeter has everything except a defining personality. He's young yet, but his boundless energy bodes well for the future. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

The Modern Jazz Quartet, at the Blue Note.

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—A tiny, low-key supper club where the jazz, like the Spanish-American cuisine, can take on a spicy, multicultural flavor. June 22-24: The **CECIL BROOKS III** quintet.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Jazz and fine Italian food. June 26-July 1: A trio, featuring **JOHN BUNCH, JAY LEONHART,** and **BUCKY PIZZARELLI.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum." Through Aug. 13. . . . ¶ A major exhibition of work by the great French photographer Nadar (1820-1910). Like Andy Warhol, Nadar formed a surrogate family out of his fellow bohemians. In addition to capturing underground characters, he shot underground Paris itself: the catacombs, with their skeletons, their sewers, their haunting chiaroscuro expanses. And he was obsessed with hot-air balloons and flying machines. The prominent Parisians who sat for him included Berlioz, Delacroix, and Dumas *père*. Particularly fascinating are the images, including physiological experiments and Pierrots, that Nadar's younger brother had a hand in. Through July 9. . . . ¶ "Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age." Fifty works by the preëminent nineteenth-century cabinetmaking and decorating firm; in conjunction with "Decorating the American Home, 1850-1900," which includes furnishings, pattern books, and catalogues. Both shows through July 30. . . . ¶ The fifty-three paintings, drawings, and watercolors that make up the Annenberg Collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterworks are on view. . . . **NOTE:** The museum's roof garden is open, when weather permits. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Video Spaces: Eight Installations," recent work by Judith Barry and Brad Miskell, Stan Douglas, Teiji Furuhashi, Gary Hill, Chris Marker, Marcel Odenbach, Tony Oursler, and Bill Viola. Starts June 22. . . . ¶ "Artist's Choice: Elizabeth Murray." A large show of paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints by seventy female artists, including Frida Kahlo, Agnes Martin, Louise Bourgeois, Georgia O'Keeffe, Joan Mitchell, and Eva Hesse. Through Aug. 22. . . . ¶ Ten black-and-white photographs by Gilles Peress documenting the massacres and the refugee camps in Rwanda and Zaire. Through Aug. 1. . . . ¶ Ceramic razor blades, a carbon-fiber airplane, and titanium eyeglass frames are a few of the more than two hundred objects in "Mutant Materials in Contemporary Design." Through Aug. 27. . . . ¶ "Designing Magic: Disney Animation Art" features more than three hundred drawings, paintings, cels, and other objects showing the studio's progress from "Steamboat Willie" to "Pocahontas." (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—A large survey of paintings by the German Neo-Expressionist Georg Baselitz. . . . ¶ "Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light," a show of paintings on glass, glass constructions, oil paintings, and rarely exhibited photographs. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway—A survey of Gary Hill's œuvre, in which room after darkened room offers video works of technical finesse and strange, even ravishing beauty. In "Searchlight," for example, a motorized cylinder, which beams an image of an ocean horizon onto the opposite wall, slowly moves from side to side; as the projector approaches the limit of its range, the circular image stretches into a ghostly ellipse, with the sound of waves providing a mournful counterpoint.

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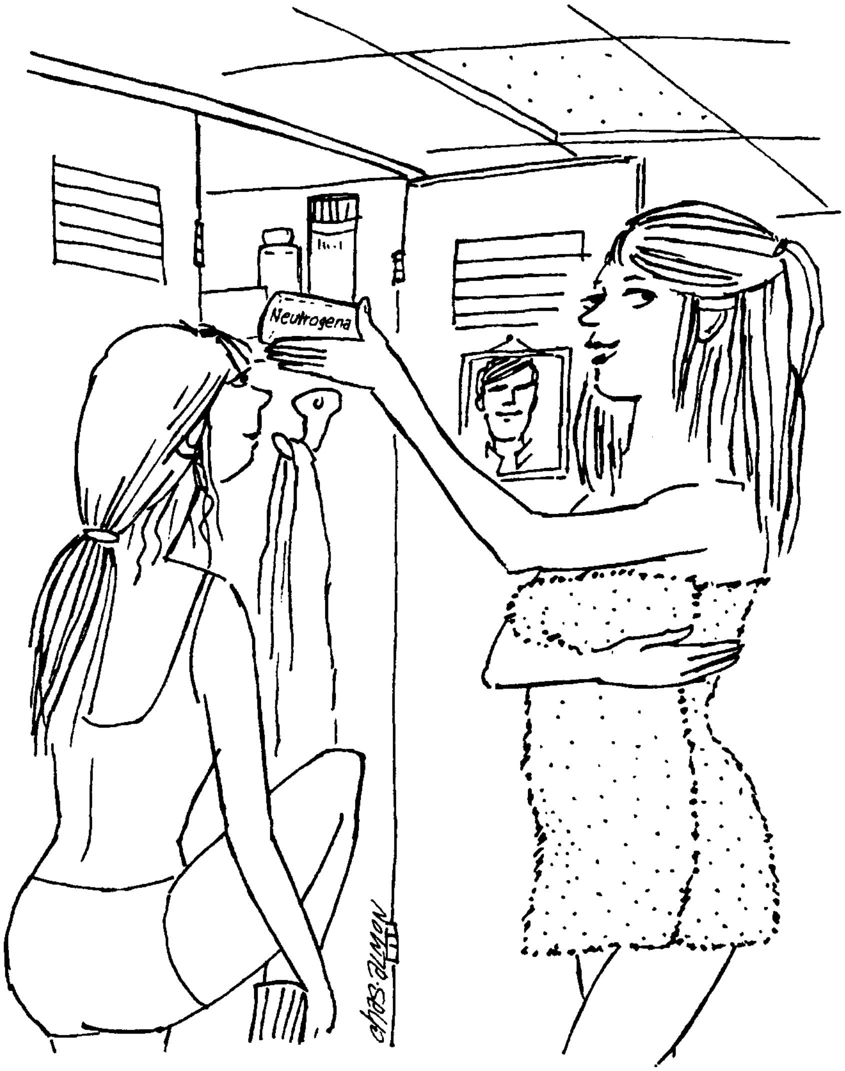

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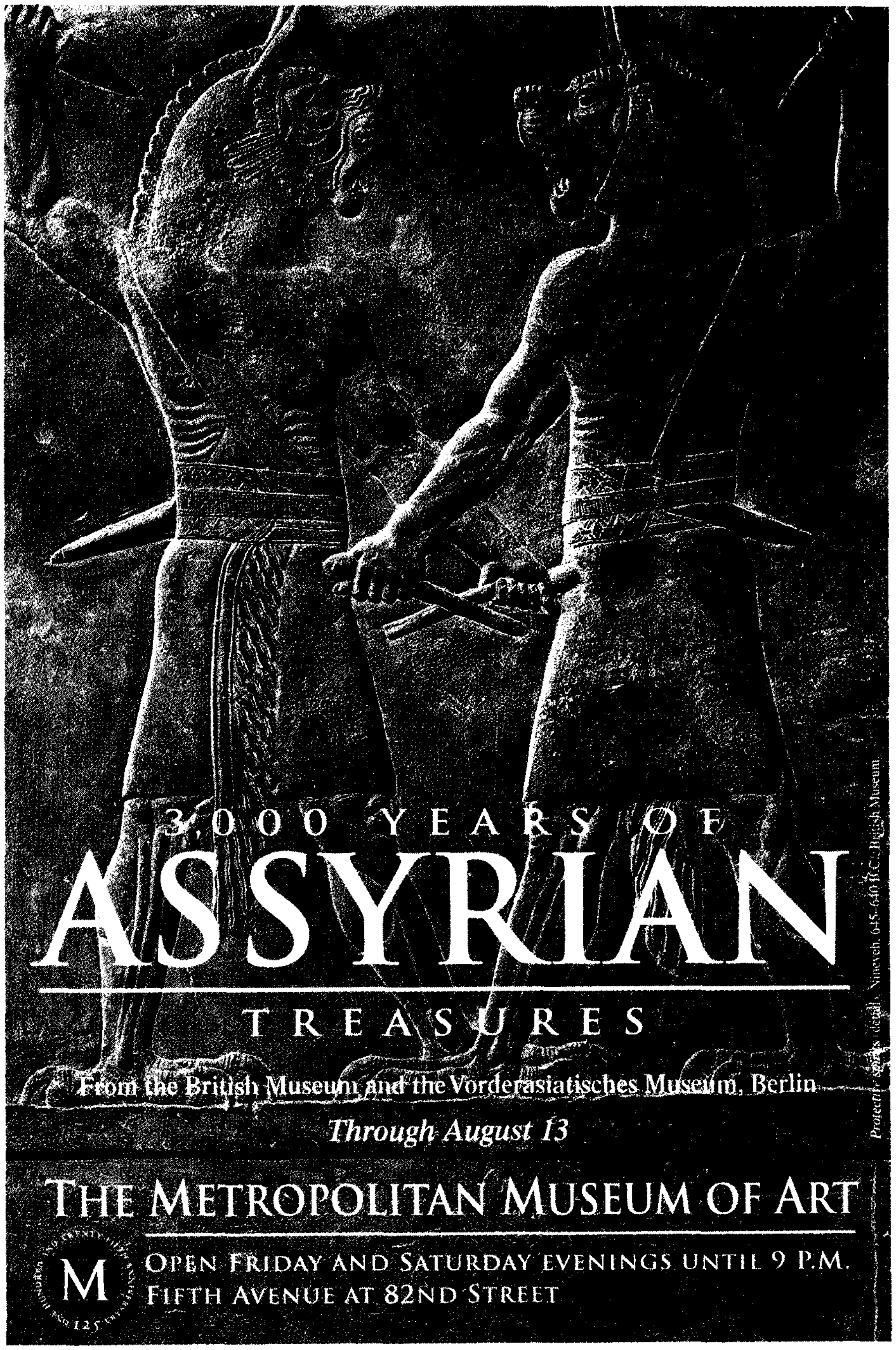
Through Aug. 20. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—The 1995 Whitney Biennial. The third and fourth floors have closed; the second floor and lobby gallery remain open through June 25. . . . ¶ "Edward Hopper and the American Imagination," a selection of sixty-five paintings intended to explore his sensibility rather than illustrate his themes or artistic development. Works will be hung in groups accompanied by passages from writers that Hopper admired, including Emerson, Frost, and E. B. White. Starts June 22. . . . ¶ In the new series "Views from Abroad: European Perspectives on American Art," guest curators from European institutions will organize shows using works from the Whitney's collection and from their own museums' holdings. The first installment is curated by Rudi Fuchs, the director of the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam. Starts June 29. (Open Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 9, with no admission charge after 6 on both evenings; and, on Fridays after 6, live music and performances in the lower gallery.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St.—Guess who's back? Some one hundred saurischian and ornithischian dinosaurs. That means a cleaned and repositioned *Tyrannosaurus rex*, an apatosaurus with a new skull and neck bones, and many other specimens, eighty-five per cent of which are real fossils (as opposed to casts). (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb," a series of sixty gridded paintings with Native American, Freudian, Joycean, and other imagery, in free-associative compositions. Through Aug. 27. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—Beach parties, cocktails, airplanes, and modern-art patterns, in an array of colors and textures, are the stars of "Kitsch to Corbusier: Wallpaper from the 1950s." Through Aug. 27. . . . ¶ "The Structure of Style: Dutch Modernism in the Applied Arts 1880-1930." Through Aug. 20. . . . ¶ A display of jewelry and accessories from the museum's collection, including Egyptian mummy beads and gold snuffboxes. (Open Tuesdays, except July 4, from 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)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125
Protective spirits (detail), Nineveh, 645-640 B.C. British Museum

Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St.—Gerhard Richter's "Atlas," more than six hundred large panels mounted with thousands of photographs. For upward of thirty years, the German painter has been amassing both archival material (including images of Hitler and of concentration-camp survivors, as well as postcards and pornography) and his own snapshots as sources for his art. For nearly as long he's been organizing these thousands of pictures on panels. Richter has always toyed with the interplay between photography and painting; this strange, obsessive, ongoing art project provides valuable insights into the methods and themes of one of the most influential and enigmatic artists of the postwar era. Through June 25; reopens Sept. 14. . . . ¶ "Worlds Envisioned: Alighiero e Boetti and Frédéric Bruly Bouabré." Through June 25. . . . ¶ "Andy Warhol: The Last Supper Paintings." Through June 25. . . . ¶ "Rest," by Franz West, an installation of twenty-seven couches on the center's roof. Through June 25. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"The Golden Age of Danish Art: Drawings from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen." Seventy-five works from the first half of the nineteenth century, including sketches and studies by Nikolai Abildgaard, Jens Juel, and Christoffer Wihelm Eckersberg. Through Aug. 13. (Open Tuesdays, except July 4, through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Camille Pissarro: Impressionist Innovator" includes many of the artist's landscapes, figure paintings, family portraits, and Japonism-inspired design experiments. Through July 16. . . . ¶ "Women Photographers of the Weimar Republic," late-twenties and thirties works by Lucia Moholy, Lotte Jacobi, Hannah Höch, Florence Henri, and others. Through July 30. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Museo del Barrio, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Reaffirming Spirituality," the third exhibition in the series "Artists Talk Back: Visual Conversations with El Museo." In every installment, participating artists have each chosen a work from the permanent collection to display alongside one of their own. Among the current thirty-four are Cándida Alvarez, Carlos Gutiérrez Solana, and Jaime Davidovich. Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 5; Thursdays, noon to 7.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Play Ball: From Stickball to Baseball." Getcha trophies, bleacher seats, World Series balls, bats, and yearbooks heah. Through Aug. 20. . . . ¶ Twenty neighborhood, subway, restaurant, and skyline scenes are on view in "New York Now: Contemporary Cityscape Paintings." (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Robert Andrew Parker—A retrospective of watercolors and drawings, accompanied by stories and accounts of dreams. Through July 14. (Dintenfass, 50 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays and July 3-4.)

Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948)—Late paintings, assemblages, and collages by the great German Dadaist. On the evidence of this show, painting was not Schwitters' forte; a few of the works here suggest the generic abstractions that hung in the background in Jacques Tati's sendup of Modernism, "Mon Oncle." The collages and some of the assemblages, though, recall the wit, delicacy, and formal grace of Schwitters' finest work of the twenties. Through June 30. (Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

"Works on Paper"—A largely first-rate show, including, among the more unpredictable offerings, a splendid graphite abstraction by the eccentric Myron Stout and a marvellously ugly "Fingerpainting" by the suave German ironist Gerhard Richter. Through June 24. (Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St.)

Short List—**HELMUT LÖHR,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. Through June 30. . . . **DAVID ROW,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays and July 3-4; through July 28. . . . **JOAQUIN TORRES-GARCIA,** CDS Gallery, 76 E. 79th St. Through June 24. . . . **EMIEL VERRANEMAN,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays and July 4; through July 7. . . . **ROLF WALZ,** Baron-Boisanté, 50 W. 57th St. Closed Saturdays and July 4; through July 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Philip Guston (1913-80)—"Poem-Pictures," a series of drawings with verse, from the seventies, when the artist abandoned Abstract Expressionism. It makes a nice counterpoint to the recent show, at McKee, of his fifties abstractions. Through July 28. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Open Wednesday evenings until 8.)

Leone & Macdonald—Mixed-medium works that allude to the ambivalences of love and domesticity, by the Neo-Conceptualist duo. "Handmade Straight Jacket"—two brown wool sweaters sewn together—is the artists' most pointed (and compelling) illustration of the joys and terrors of the romantic bond. Through June 30. (Fawbush, 76 Grand St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Malcolm Morley—The British-born painter has always been a bit of an iconoclast: his eccentric canvases flirt with Pop and Photo-Realism but remain obdurate hybrids. These new oils recall, in fantasy form, his wartime childhood in London; in certain works, small models much like the ones he built as a boy jut from the surfaces. Through June 24. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

Rirkrit Tiravanija—In "Untitled, 1995 (Still)"—which both resumes and alters his last show here, two and a half years ago—the front gallery remains empty, while the rear gallery has been turned into a makeshift kitchen where the artist prepares Thai curries for the curious and/or hungry. The modest office space has been taken over by a display of touristy snapshots of foreign lands, and the influx of visitors into this usually private precinct must be a strain on even the most patient gallery assistant's nerves. Through July 1. (303 Gallery, 89 Greene St.)

Lincoln Tobier—Study models for "(It all comes together in) Ruckus L.A.," a large-scale model of Los Angeles that the artist will make in collaboration with several of that city's residents. Through June 25. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

"The Moderns"—Tony Payne definitely wasn't thinking of Picasso and Braque when he curated this large and rather loosely conceived group show. Sex—especially in its more unconventional and/or lurid forms—is the running theme. The legend on a small 1985 Andy Warhol painting of a man with a star on his forehead queries "ARE YOU DIFFERENT?"; given the preponderance of male nudity, S. & M. shenanigans, and cross-dressing, the answer is "In this context, no." Recreational drug use provides an occasional thematic chaser. Through July 28. (Feature, 76 Greene St. Closed July 1 and July 4-5.)

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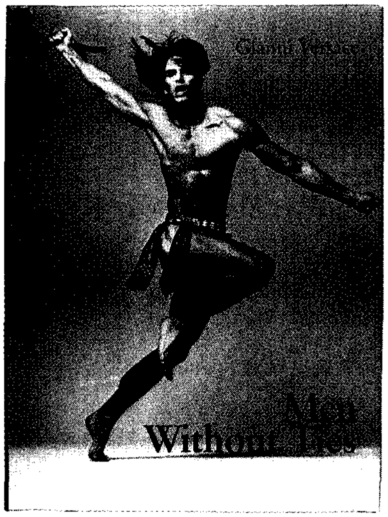

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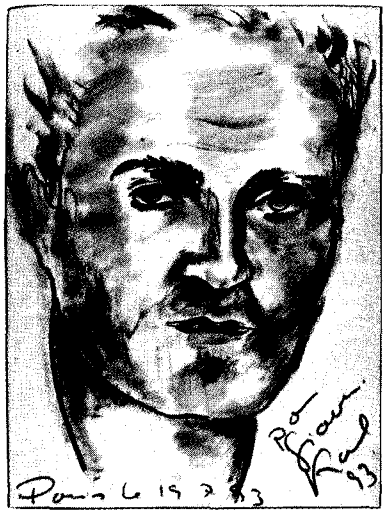
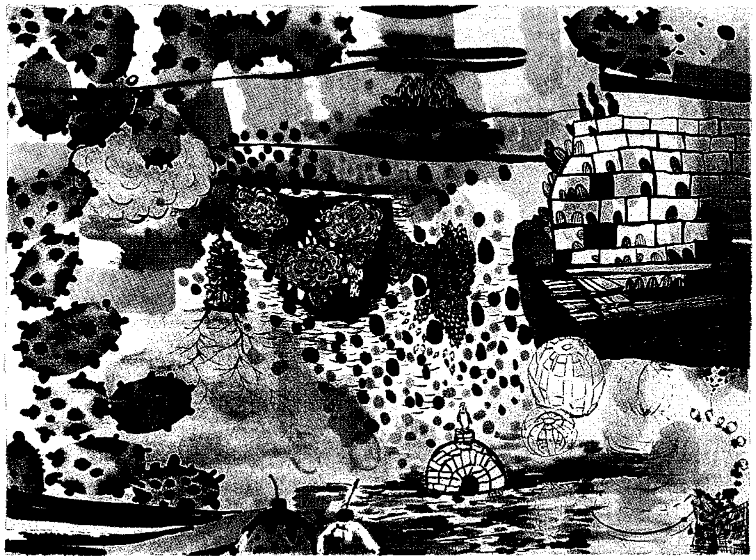


"Way Cool"—Paintings, sculptures, installations, and photographs by a variety of young artists whom curators Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo regard as representatives of the next new wave. The Generation X-style title indicates that the American obsession with youth dies hard—even as the youngsters in the show repeat, perhaps unconsciously, the gestures of their elders (Kienholz, Longo, Rauschenberg, and Clemente all make spectral appearances). Assemblage and cartoon aesthetics rule, and sex remains the favored topic. Through July 14. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. Open Friday and Saturday evenings until 8. Closed July 1 and July 4.)



An untitled painting by Nina Bovasso in "Way Cool," at Exit Art.

Short List—**STEPHAN BALKENHOL,** Gladstone, 99 Greene St. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through June 30. . . . **BARBARA BLOOM,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. Through June 30. . . . **LUCA BUVOLI,** Weber, 142 Greene St. Through July 1. . . . **NANCY DAVENPORT** and **MARIA HAHNENKAMP,** Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St. Through July 1. . . . **SIGRID HACKENBERG,** Merians, 76 Greene St. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6; through July 1. . . . **BRYAN HUNT,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. Through July 15. . . . **BARRY LE VA,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. Closed July 1 and July 4; through July 28. . . . **FRED SANDBACK,** Markey, 55 Vandam St., between Varick and Hudson Sts. Open Tuesdays through Fridays, except July 4-5, from 10 to 2; through July 14. . . . **YUKINORI YANAGI,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. Closed July 1 and July 4; through July 29. . . . **HEIMO ZOBERING,** Rosen, 130 Prince St. Through July 1.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—June 23: Clothing, jewelry, furniture, and silver from the estate of Lillian Gish. . . . ¶ June 26: An auction benefitting several AIDS organizations, and honoring Sotheby's celebrated auctioneer Robert Woolley. Attendees will be bidding on a walk-on part in a Mike Nichols film, in addition to an array of art works. . . . ¶ June 29: Judaica and other items from the Zagayski collection. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Joel-Peter Witkin—Horror is seductive in these images of hideously mutilated corpses (real ones, from a morgue in Mexico City) that have been propped up in carefully art-directed pseudo-Victorian sets. It's hardly surprising that so many people loathe Witkin's photographs—they're frightening. The work, however, has an essential property of memorable art: it astonishes. Through June 24. (Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St.)

New York School—Vintage urban landscapes, street scenes, and portraits by Louis Faurer, Lisette Model, Leon Levinstein, and Weegee. Through June 30. (Sander, 19 E. 76th St.)

International Center of Photography—Candid photographs of celebrities and other subjects, by Ruth Orkin (1921-85). Through July 16. . . . ¶ "PhotoDiary," forty large-format pictures of musicians, by Lynn Goldsmith. Through July 16. . . . ¶ "Lucky Strikes," photos by Toby Old of the late-seventies disco scene, the boxing world, county fairs, and other often bizarre communities. Through July 16. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays and July 4, from 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"An American Century of Photography: From Dry-Plate to Digital—The Hallmark Photographic Collection." Two hundred works by both well-known photographers (including Stieglitz, Weston, Strand, and Steiner) and less familiar ones. Through Sept. 10. . . . ¶ "Eyes on an Era," works from the thirties through the sixties by photojournalist Irving Haberman. Through Sept. 10. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Open daily, except Mondays and July 4, from 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

"Faces"—Not portraits, but candid glimpses of people walking, working, relaxing, etc., by Levitt, Evans, Friedlander, Weegee, Klien, Winogrand, and others. Through July 27. (Seagram Building, 375 Park Ave., at 52nd St., fourth floor. Open Mondays through Thursdays, 9 to 5; Fridays, 9 to 1. Closed July 3-4.)

"1945: Red Army Storms Berlin"—Vintage documentary prints by conscripted photographers Dmitri Baltermants, Max Alpert, Yevgeni Khaldey, and others. Through June 28. (Schickler, 52 E. 76th St.)

"Actual Photos"—A 1985 collaboration between Laurie Simmons and Allan McCollum. The fifty distorted, sometimes gruesome images are all faces of Lilliputian figurines, shot through a microscope. Through June 30. (Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St.)

Short List—**ZEKE BERMAN,** Saul, 560 Broadway. Through June 30. . . . **JOHN BRILL,** Kent, 67 Prince St. Through July 28. . . . **KEVIN BUBRISKI,** National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. Open Tuesdays, 2 to 6, and Wednesdays through Sundays, 12 to 6; through July 9. . . . **LINDA MC CARTNEY,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. Through June 30. . . . **JO ANN VERBURG,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through Aug. 18.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Dia Center for the Arts, and the Jewish Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Estate of the Arts

CARAMOOR lies fifty-five minutes and a universe away from midtown Manhattan. The Katonah estate's Italianate neo-Renaissance mansion was constructed during the nineteen-thirties, as the summer residence of a family that surrounded itself with musicians, dancers, actors, and artists. By 1946, Caramoor's lawns, gardens, and pavilions were so awash in culture that its owners began opening the gates to the public. Half a century later, the hundred-acre expanse has become home to one of the Northeast's finest summer music festivals, complete with an outdoor theatre and music tent, a resident ensemble (the Orchestra of St. Luke's), a distinguished artistic adviser (André Previn), and a procession of notable guests. When its semicentennial season opens, on June 24, the orchestra will share the stage with two such visitors: the eminent English conductor Raymond Leppard and the pianist Garrick Ohlsson, who, like Caramoor, is a musical product of which Westchester County can be justly proud.

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—Presenting free outdoor concert performances. June 21: "Rigoletto," with Maureen O'Flynn, Vincenzo La Scola, and Paolo Gavanelli; conducted by Christian Badea. (Long Meadow Ballfields, Prospect Park, Brooklyn.) . . . June 23: "La Traviata," with Veronica Villarroel, Frank Lopardo, and Paolo Coni; Edoardo Müller. (Marine Park, Brooklyn.) . . . June 24: "Rigoletto," with Mary Dunleavy, Eduardo Valdes, and Theodore Lambrinos; Mr. Badea. (Miller Field, Staten Island.) . . . June 27: "La Traviata," with Ainhoa Arteta, Vladimir Grishko, and Mr. Coni; Mr. Müller. (Brookdale Park, Montclair, N.J.) . . . June 28: "Rigoletto," with Ms. O'Flynn, Mr. La Scola, and Mr. Lambrinos; Mr. Badea. (Brookdale Park.) . . . June 30: "La Traviata," with Ms. Arteta, Mr. Grishko, and Mr. Coni; Mr. Müller. (Buccleuch Park, New Brunswick, N.J.) . . . July 1: "Rigoletto," with Ms. O'Flynn, Mr. La Scola, and Mr. Lambrinos; Mr. Badea. (Cooper River Park, Pennsauken, N.J.) (Evenings at 8. For rain dates and other information, call 362-6000.)

AMERICAN OPERA / MUSICAL THEATRE COMPANY—Presenting "The Small Jewel Box," with a libretto by Paul Griffiths crafted to music by Mozart. (New York Academy of Art, 111 Franklin St. June 22 at 8:15 and June 23 at 8. For information about tickets, call 594-1839.)

HARMONIA OPERA COMPANY—Presenting "Ayame," a one-act opera by Yutaka Makino (with a libretto by Yukio Mishima), among other works. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. June 25 at 2:30.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA—The company opens the second season in its seven-year traversal of Verdi's twenty-eight operas with a staged production of "I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata." Vincent La Selva conducts. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 28 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

OPÉRA FRANÇAIS DE NEW YORK—Yves Abel conducts a semi-staged production of Offenbach's "Orphée aux Enfers," with soprano Tracy Dahl and tenor Gordon Gietz, plus the redoubtable Vera Galupe-Borszkh (deigning to appear with a company other than

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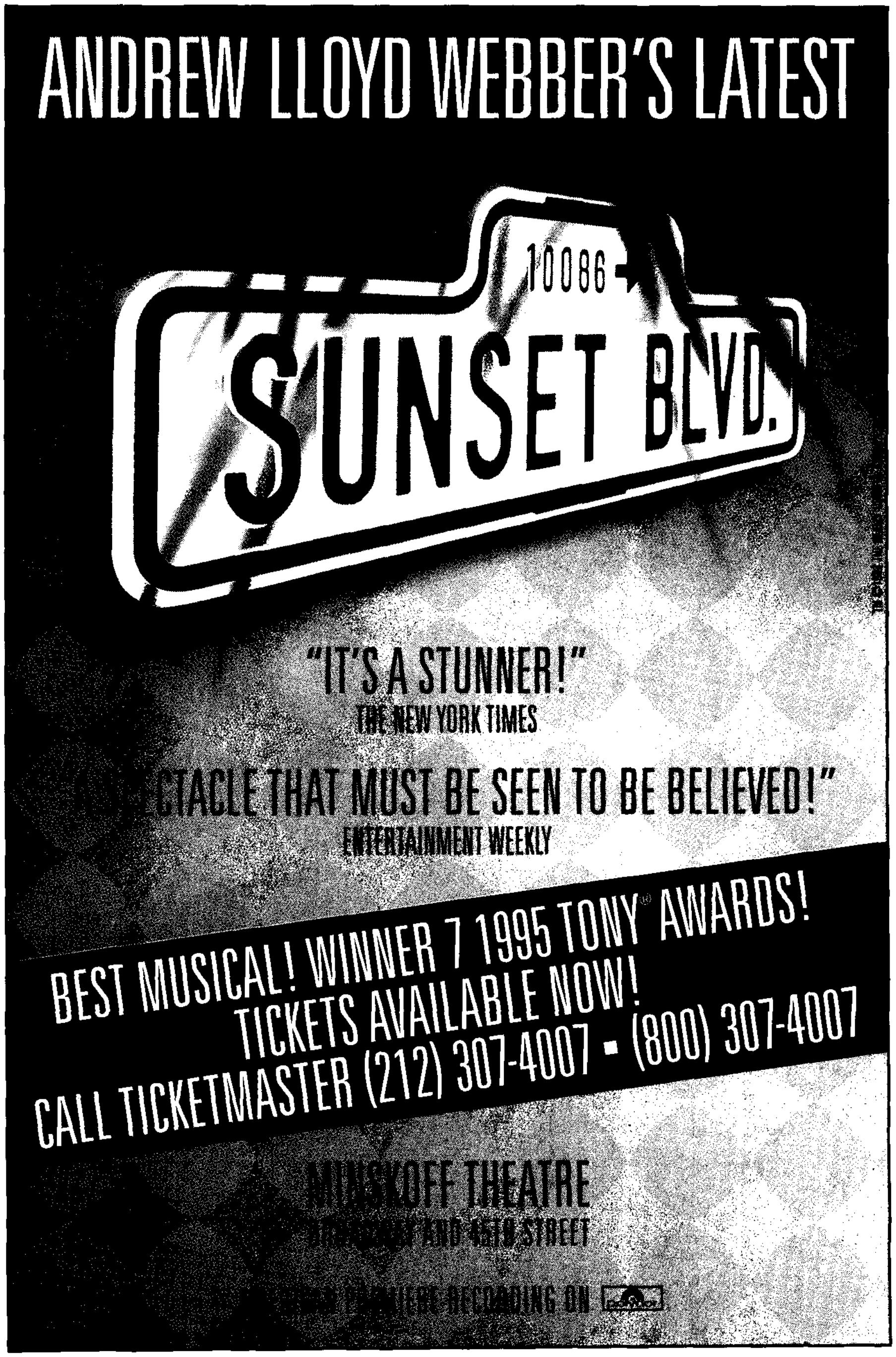
her own La Gran Scena), in the role of Public Opinion. The operetta marked a make-or-break moment in Offenbach's career: by 1858, he and his troupe were in such financial straits that he had to check into a hotel under a false name to evade his creditors. "Orphée aux Enfers" ("Orpheus in the Underworld"), an irreverent parody of the Greek myth, was his last-ditch hope for a hit. The reception was lukewarm, until an influential Parisian critic blasted the work as a "profanation of holy and glorious antiquity"—failing, however, to admit that much of his pique resulted from the librettists' having appropriated some of his own purple prose for a particularly ridiculous passage. Offenbach gleefully publicized the truth, and the ensuing imbroglio ensured the work's success. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. June 28 at 8.)

CONCERTS

Swedish Sounds—During her ten-year reign (1644-54), Queen Christina of Sweden did much to ally her nation with Europe's musical mainstream. In 1647, she engaged a contingent of French musicians for royal ballet performances, and five years later established her own Italian-language opera company. The New York Consort of Viols performs dances from Christina's court, in a program that also includes pieces by English composers who worked in Scandinavia (Dowland, William Brade, and Tobias Hume), and Spanish and French music from manuscripts in the University of Uppsala's library. (Church of Sweden, 5 E. 48th St. June 21 at 8. For information about tickets, call 580-9787.)

Robert White—The tenor sings classical and popular songs on display in the Morgan Library's current exhibition of musical memorabilia from the James Fuld Collection; with pianist Samuel Sanders. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008. June 22 at 6:15.)

Bargemusic—June 22 at 7:30 and June 25 at 4: String quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 54, No. 1) and Beethoven (in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4), as well as Brahms's Piano Quintet; with violinists Mark Peskanov and Yuri Vodovoz, violist Rainer Moog, cellist Fred Sherry, and pianist Paige Roberts Hoffman. . . . ¶ June 29 at 7:30 and July 2 at 4: Clarinettist Charles Neidich, cellist Fred Sherry, and pianist Rita Sloan offer sonatas by Bernstein (for clarinet) and Debussy (for cello), as well as trios by Beethoven and Brahms. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061.)



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New York City Gay Men's Chorus—Gary Miller directing; with the Stonewall Chorale, Lavender Light Gospel Choir, and soprano Harolyn Blackwell. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. June 22 at 8.)

"Cooler in the Shade" Festival—Concluding dates of the avant-garde music and performance series. June 23: Judy Dunaway (voice and balloons), Dan Evans Farkas (electronics and toys), and Lou Acierno (comedy) join for a program that defies further description. . . . ¶ June 24: Improvisations that feature the sonorities of amplified bicycles, tuning forks, and soda straws, against a visual backdrop that enumerates (in Latin) the characteristics of a hundred and ninety species of bamboo. . . . ¶ June 30: An ensemble called Trousers takes an improvisatory stab at such themes as Greek mythology, hallucinations, and tabloid news. (Evenings at 8. Lotus Center, 109 W. 27th St. 627-1076. Lemonade included with the price of admission.)

Island Getaways—June 25 at noon: The Ex Umbris ensemble performs Elizabethan music. . . . ¶ July 2 at noon: Christopher Costanza is the soloist in both of Haydn's cello concertos; with the City Island Baroque Ensemble. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478.)

Salon Soirées—June 25 at 6 and 8: A program of Ilan Rechtman's "Jazzicals." . . . ¶ July 2 at 6 and 8: Violinist Chin Kim and Mr. Rechtman (playing piano) perform sonatas by Bach and Schubert (in A Major). (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. No tickets necessary.)

MOMA "Summergarden"—This year's outdoor programs propose the argument that, the notable creations of composers in the two prewar decades notwithstanding, American music did not reach full fruition until the years between 1945 and 1970. Could be. In the opening concert: Piston's "Divertimento for Nine Instruments," Irving Fine's "Serious Song" (for string orchestra), Jacob Druckman's "Incenters," and Barber's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" (with soprano Renée Santer). Joel Sachs conducts performers from the Juilliard School. (Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 14 W. 54th St. June 30-July 1 at 8:30. No tickets necessary.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

NAUMBERG ORCHESTRA: With soprano Theresa Santiago. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. June 24 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **TESS REMY-SCHUMACHER:** Cellist, in a program that includes sonatas by Brahms (his Second) and Shostakovich. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. June 24 at 8:30.) . . . **NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS.** (Broadway Presbyterian Church, Broadway at 114th St. June 27 at 8. Admission by contribution.)

OUT OF TOWN

Cape May Music Festival—Final concerts of the season. June 21 at 8:30: The St. Lawrence String Quartet. . . . ¶ June 25 at 8:30: Pianist Christopher O'Reilly performs Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations, among other works. (Congress Hall Hotel, Cape May, N.J. For information about tickets, call 1-609 884-5404.)

Bach Aria Festival—The final two programs of this year's festival. (Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook, Long Island. June 23-24 at 8:30.) . . . ¶ On June 25, the annual "Bachanalia," with concerts at 2 and 4:45. (Chelsea Center, East Norwich, Long Island. For information about all festival events, call 1-516 632-7230.)

Opera Festival of New Jersey—June 23 and July 1 at 8, and June 25 at 3: "Rigoletto," with Kathryn Gamberoni, Keith Buhl, and Hans Choi; conducted by Hal France. . . . ¶ June 24 and June 29 at 8, and July 2 at 3: "The Elixir of Love," in English, with Abbie Furmansky, Richard Clement, William Parcher, and Richard Byrne; Louis Salemno. (The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J. 1-609 936-1500.)

Maverick Concerts—June 24 at 5: A musical open house, with numerous performers. June 25 at 3: The Shanghai String Quartet plays quartets by Haydn (in D Major, Op. 20, No. 4) and Zhou Long ("Song of the Ch'in"). Ruth Laredo assists them in Schumann's Piano Quintet and offers solo-piano works by Albéniz and de Falla. . . . ¶ July 1 at noon: Peter Oundjian, the first violinist of the Tokyo String Quartet, joins the members of the St. Lawrence String Quartet in a lecture-demonstration on quartet playing. . . . ¶ July 2 at 3 : Oboist Humbert Lucarelli joins with members of the Colorado String Quartet to perform Mozart's Oboe Quartet and Britten's "Phantasy Quartet." The Colorado foursome also plays Brahms's B-Flat-Major Quartet, with no outside help. (Woodstock, N.Y. 1-914 679-8217.)

Music Mountain—June 24 at 8: The Galvanized Jazz Band. . . . ¶ June 25 at 3: The Cassatt String Quartet plays quartets by Mozart (in G Major, K. 387) and Mendelssohn (in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1); Mihae Lee joins them for Fauré's C-Minor Piano Quintet. . . . ¶ July 1 at 8: Quartets by Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1) and Schubert (the "Death and the Maiden"), as well as Brahms's Piano Quintet, played by the Ying String Quartet and pianist Jean Barr. . . . ¶ July 2 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet, with pianist Michael Boriskin and double-bass player Alvin Brehm, in a program that comprises Mozart's D-Minor Quartet (K. 421), Shostakovich's Quartet No. 7, and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Falls Village, Conn. For information about tickets, call 1-203 824-7126.)

Caramoor—June 24 at 8:30: Raymond Leppard leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Mendelssohn's Overture to "Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde," the Adagietto from Mahler's Symphony No. 5, Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Garrick Ohlsson), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 8. . . . ¶ June 25 at 5:30: Pianist Misha Dichter performs Beethoven's Sonatas in E-Flat Major (Op. 31, No. 3) and C Minor (Op. 111), as well as waltzes by Brahms and "Hungarian Rhapsodies" by Liszt. . . . ¶ June 29 at 4:15: The Chamber Ensemble of the American Russian Youth Orchestra offers Stravinsky's Octet, Barber's String Quartet, and Shostakovich's Piano Quintet. . . . ¶ June 30 at 8:30: The St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble plays a Haydn flute trio, Beethoven's Sextet for Two Horns and Strings (Op. 81b), and Brahms's A-Major Piano Quartet. Pianist Awadagin Pratt assists in the Brahms and offers ruminations on Bach by Liszt and Busoni. . . . ¶ July 1 at 8:30: An evening of Vivaldi concertos, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, classical guitarist Angel Romero, and numerous soloists from the orchestra's ranks. . . . ¶ July 2 at 5:30: The American Russian Youth Orchestra performs Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 (the "Classical"), Copland's "Music for the Theatre," Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, and short works by Joan Tower and Daron Hagen. Leon Botstein and Constantine Orbelian share the conducting duties. . . . ¶ July 4 at 5:30: The inimitable soprano Barbara Cook, with her longtime pianist and music director Wally Harper, performing American popular-song classics. (Katonah, N.Y. 1-914 232-1252. The season continues through Aug. 13.)

Glimmerglass Opera—Opening performances of the season, which runs through Aug. 21. July 1 at 8 and July 3 at 2: "The Yeomen of the Guard." . . . ¶ July 2 at 2: "Don Giovanni." (Cooperstown, N.Y. 1-607 547-2255.)

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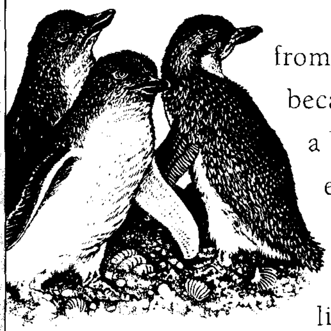

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CHAPTER AND VERSE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF READINGS

Writers don't meet their public all that often. But New Yorkers are lucky: a few stages, cafés, and bars have had success at conjuring the secretive clan. Here's a selection of the best of them.

92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. (996-1100)—The canon's mouth. The hall is august, the sound system efficient, the audience rapt, and the writers, mostly, sober (although Dorothy Parker, appearing in 1954, was so befogged that she mistook the warm ovation at the end of her reading for welcoming applause and started over). This is the series you'd take with you to a desert island. Prose and poetry weekly from October to May, with very few clinkers.

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—At the monthly "Selected Shorts," authors pop in, betray their accents and idiosyncrasies, say a few words about one or more of their short stories to the largely subscriber audience, and step aside. Then professionals like Blythe Danner, Mary Beth Hurt, and Matthew Broderick take over and bring out the subtleties. The overall effect is very N.P.R., with down-home bits sandwiched between layers of actorly smoothness.

A Different Light, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—"Welcome to the largest gay and lesbian bookstore on planet Earth," the man with the fuschia T-shirt and matching widow's peak announces. The basement gatherings here—movies, musicales, and discussion groups, as well as readings by out memoirists, lesbian mystery writers, bisexual Harvard professors, and so forth—are well attended, and the crowd is not shy. Evenings with even the coolest art-for-art's-sake writers can edge toward political heat. Or maybe someone simply stands up as the evening ends—"Uh, before you go, people, can I make an announcement?"—and discussion continues up the stairs and into the bookstore's café, A Different Bite.

KGB, 85 E. 4th St. (799-1044)—The framed photo of a female cosmonaut, the Lenin banner awarded for meeting production quotas, the bust of Taras Shevchenko (the Ukrainian Shakespeare) behind the vodka bottles—these are not the ironic additions of recent owners but the honest apparatchik décor of the bar's erstwhile Cold War tenant, the United States branch of the Ukrainian Communist Party. The new management has added a coat of five-alarm-red paint, some red silk bunting, and a Sunday-night series of readings by such standard-bearers of the new lyricism as Donna Tartt, Rick Moody, and A. M. Homes, who pack the dive with book-world insiders.

Nuyorican Poets Café, 236 E. 3rd St. (505-8183)—Home of the poetry slam, a Friday night showdown in which survivors of the Open Room—the café's first-come, first-heard readings—take turns incanting for a club full of Rolling Rockers while a panel of judges score their efforts like floor routines. The traditions here are oral (hip-hop, griot, Santería, street), politico-ecstatic (with nods to Allen Ginsberg and Jayne Cortez), and ecstatico-musical (in the style of John Coltrane, Celia Cruz, Bikini Kill), and the whole thing swings, sings, and sometimes rhymes. The Nuyorican fired the first shot of the nineties poetry revolution—a revolution that has, in fact, been televised: café denizens such as Maggie Estep, Todd Colby, and Poet Ninety-9 have appeared in five-minute spoken-word videos on MTV.

Poets House, 72 Spring St. (431-7920)—"All my metaphors have to do with food," says Lee Ellen Briccetti, the big cheese at the SoHo poetry library. "And this place is the poetry refrigerator: come take what you want. Taste. You don't have to like it all." The loft, with its slipcovered couches and double-tall ceilings, houses thirty thousand volumes of poetry, a dizzying inventory of journals, and a catalogue of taped readings (from Ashbery to Zukofsky) to pop into a house Walkman. In the winter, Poets House sponsors the "Passwords" series, in which poets read and discuss the work of other poets. Come summer, it's sunset readings at the magic hour, on the grass by the Hudson River Park Pavilion, in Battery Park City.

Limbo, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. (477-5271)—Light filters through a trio of French doors in this Lower East Side coffee chapel, where the quiet marriage of convenience between caffeine and writing has blossomed into love. The authors at the music stand (Thom Jones, Lucy Grealy, Don DeLillo, et al.) are intimately near, though (as if the space required it) miked. The audience is a mix of ardent fans, friends of the writers, and the prose brokers, press agents, and devoted editors who have midwifed the works you are hearing into the bookstores. You can sense the gratitude and relief—despite the dude who just wandered in for his espresso and keeps scribbling through the reading as if no one else were there.

The Poetry Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. (674-0910)—Founded in 1966, the Poetry Project has outlived many of the movements it nourished. The New York School, language poetry, punk, even performance art came, filled the stage, and then blew elsewhere. Eric Bogosian and Patti Smith played here first; Jim Carroll published an early version of "The Basketball Diaries" using the Project's mimeo machine; Gregory Corso streaked here. The readings have continued with extravagant fertility: Monday-night, Wednesday-night, and late-Friday-night series, a New Year's Day marathon reading, workshops, and outreach programs—all of which insure that the Project's blend of the known (Kathy Acker, Ron Padgett, Kenward Elmslie) and the new (David Cameron, Brenda Coultas) will continue to present its seductive argument for the regenerative power of the spoken word.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Gay Pride Week—June 22 at 6: George Chauncey, Jr., author of "Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940," picks up where he left off, with a lecture on postwar gay life. (Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. No charge beyond museum admission.) . . . ¶ June 24 at 10 P.M.: The decommissioned aircraft carrier U.S.S. Intrepid is the site of a pre-parade party (three dance floors, bungee sports, flight simulators, etc.). For reservations, call 307-7171. . . . ¶ June 25: The annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade begins at 52nd Street at noon and heads down Fifth Avenue. At 2, marchers will observe a moment of silence for those who have died of AIDS. Later there will be waterfront dancing and fireworks in the West Village. For more information, call 807-7433.

Walk This Way—Learn the steps before the sun goes down, then dance beneath the stars, at Lincoln Center's Midsummer Night Swing, out on the sprung-wood dance floor in the Fountain Plaza. Lessons begin at 6:30 (styles depend on the evening's dance band); by 8:15, you can mess around with all the swingers and hustle fanatics. (Wednesdays through Saturdays, June 21-July 22. For more information, call 875-5102. No lessons Saturdays.)

Fizgigs and Whizbangs—July 4, from 9:15 to 9:55 P.M.: WPLJ FM-95.5 broadcasts a musical program, "Building Bridges," synchronized with the fireworks show over the East River. This year there are downtown and midtown shows. For the first twenty minutes, the comets, stars, streamers, screamers, etc., will go off for the Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan crowd. After that, those watching from 25th to 40th Streets will have the best view.

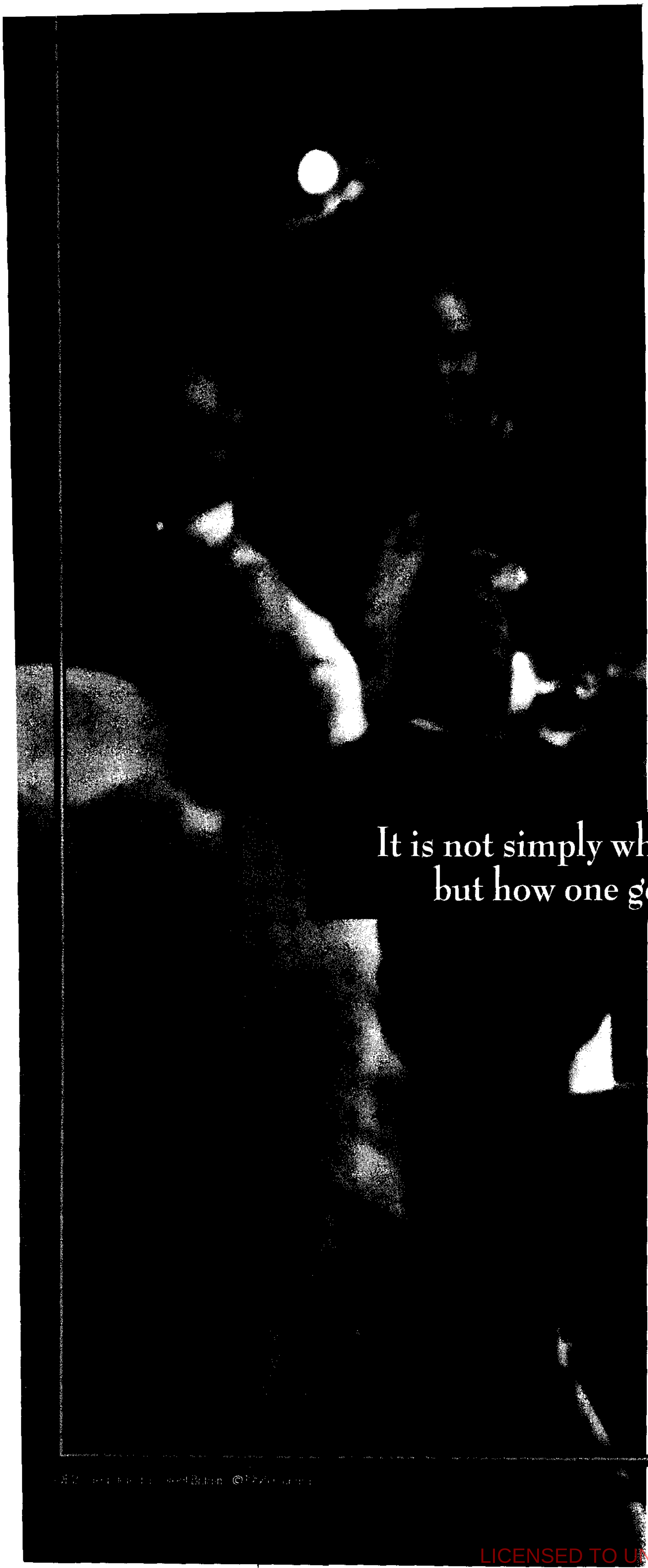
Speed Chess—World Champ Garry Kasparov. Four-day tournament. Fifty-minute games. Headphone play-by-play. Check. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510. Preliminary matches on June 20-22 at 2 and 7; semifinals and finals on June 23 at 1 and 7, respectively.)

Mermen and Mermaids—Marching bands, homemade floats, and costumed sea creatures proceed around Coney Island's amusement park in the annual Mermaid Parade. To participate, register by noon beside the Parachute Jump in Steeplechase Park, Surf Ave. at W. 17th St., Brooklyn, or call 1-718 372-5159. . . . ¶ John Manbeck recounts the history of America's first amusement park in a tour of the boardwalk, Bowery, and boulevards of Coney Island; to sign up, call 1-718 788-8549. The tour begins at 10 A.M. and ends in time for the parade at 2.

Readings—June 22 at 8: John Tytell reads from his "The Living Theatre," following a performance by Judith Malina, one of the troupe's founders. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. For reservations, call 475-3424.) . . . ¶ June 27 at 6:30: Jayne Cortez, Mark Doty, and Donna Masini take part in a Poets House Sunset Reading. (Hudson River Park Pavilion, Battery Park City. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 26 at 7:30: Problem Lady Cynthia Heimel reads from her new collection, "If You Leave Me, Can I Come Too?" (Shakespeare & Co., Broadway at 81st St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 29 at 7:30: Playwright David Sedaris reads from "Barrel Fever," his volume of funny stories and essays. (Community Bookstore, 143 Seventh Ave., at Carroll St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—June 24 at 12:30: Roberto Velez lets fly the beekeeping secrets, in a lecture and honey tasting at Wave Hill. (W. 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. For information, call 1-718 549-3200.) . . . ¶ June 27 at 6:30: Rudi Fuchs, the first curator for the Whitney's "Views from Abroad: European Perspectives on American Art," interviews painter, filmmaker, and mixed-tradition trickster David Salle. (Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. 606-0211.)

SANTIAGO COHEN



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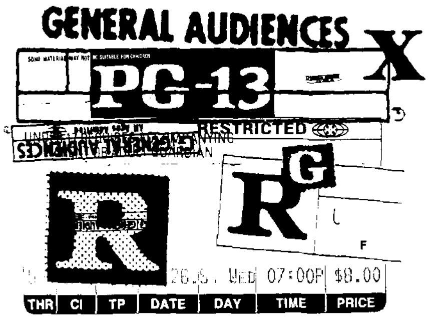


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING

APOLLO 13—Ron Howard's re-creation of the near-fatal 1970 lunar mission, starring Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton, and Kevin Bacon as the astronauts stranded in space. Also with Gary Sinise and Ed Harris. Written by William Broyles, Jr., and Al Reinert, from the 1994 book "Lost Moon," by Jim Lovell (the Apollo 13 astronaut) and Jeffrey Kluger. Opening June 30.

BALLOT MEASURE 9—Reviewed below in Current Films.

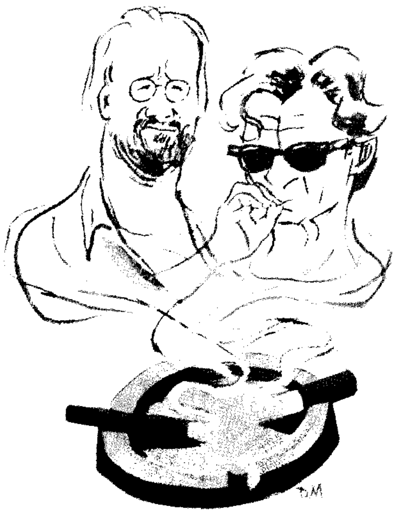
BANDIT QUEEN—The early years of Phoolan Devi (Seema Biswas), the Indian woman who massacred nearly thirty upper-caste men in 1978 and today is a political force in her nation. Directed by Shekhar Kapur. Written by Mala Sen, from Devi's prison diaries. In Hindi. Opening June 30. (Village East Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CITY UNPLUGGED—An Estonian thriller in which Russian gangsters hatch a plan to rob the national bank of the newly independent republic. Directed by a Finn, Ilkka Jarvilaturi, and written by an American, Paul Kolsby. In Estonian. Opening June 23. (Quad Cinema.)

HEAVEN'S A DRAG—A gay Londoner (Thomas Arklie) finds his cruising cramped by the ghost of his dead lover (Ian Williams), in a comedy directed by Peter Mackenzie Litten and written by Johnny Byrne. Opening June 23. (Quad Cinema.)

JUDGE DREDD—Sylvester Stallone is a twenty-second-century policeman in Danny Cannon's film version of the British comic strip. With Armand Assante, Diane Lane, Rob Schneider, and Joan Chen. Written by William Wisher and Steven E. de Souza. Opening June 30.

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS: THE MOVIE—The team of six teen-agers turned superheroes has vaulted from television to the big screen, with the cast intact. Directed by Bryan Spicer. Written by Arne Olsen. Opening June 30.



William Hurt and Harvey Keitel in "Smoke."

DAVID MAZZUCCELLI

POCAHONTAS—Disney's animated take on the Algonquin princess and Captain John Smith, with voices by Irene Bedard, Judy Kuhn, Mel Gibson, Russell Means, and Linda Hunt. Opening June 23. (Guild.)

SAFE—Todd Haynes wrote and directed this drama about an affluent San Fernando Valley housewife (Julianne Moore) who becomes a victim of environmental illness. Opening June 23. (Angelika Film Center.)

SISTER MY SISTER—Nancy Meckler's film was inspired by the 1933 incidents in a French country household—whose mistress (Julie Walters) tyrannized her two servants (Joely Richardson and Jodhi May)—that also provided the basis for Jean Genet's play "The Maids." Written by Wendy Kesselman. Opening June 23. (Cinema Village.)

WILD REEDS—In 1962, near the end of the Algerian war, a French-Algerian teen-ager (Frédéric Gorny) arrives at a boys' boarding school in the south of France, where he takes up with two students (Gaël Morel and Stéphane Rideau) and the daughter of their teacher (Elodie Bouchez). Directed by André Téchiné, who co-wrote with Gilles Taurand and Olivier Massart. In French. Opening June 30. (Quad Cinema.)

CURRENT FILMS

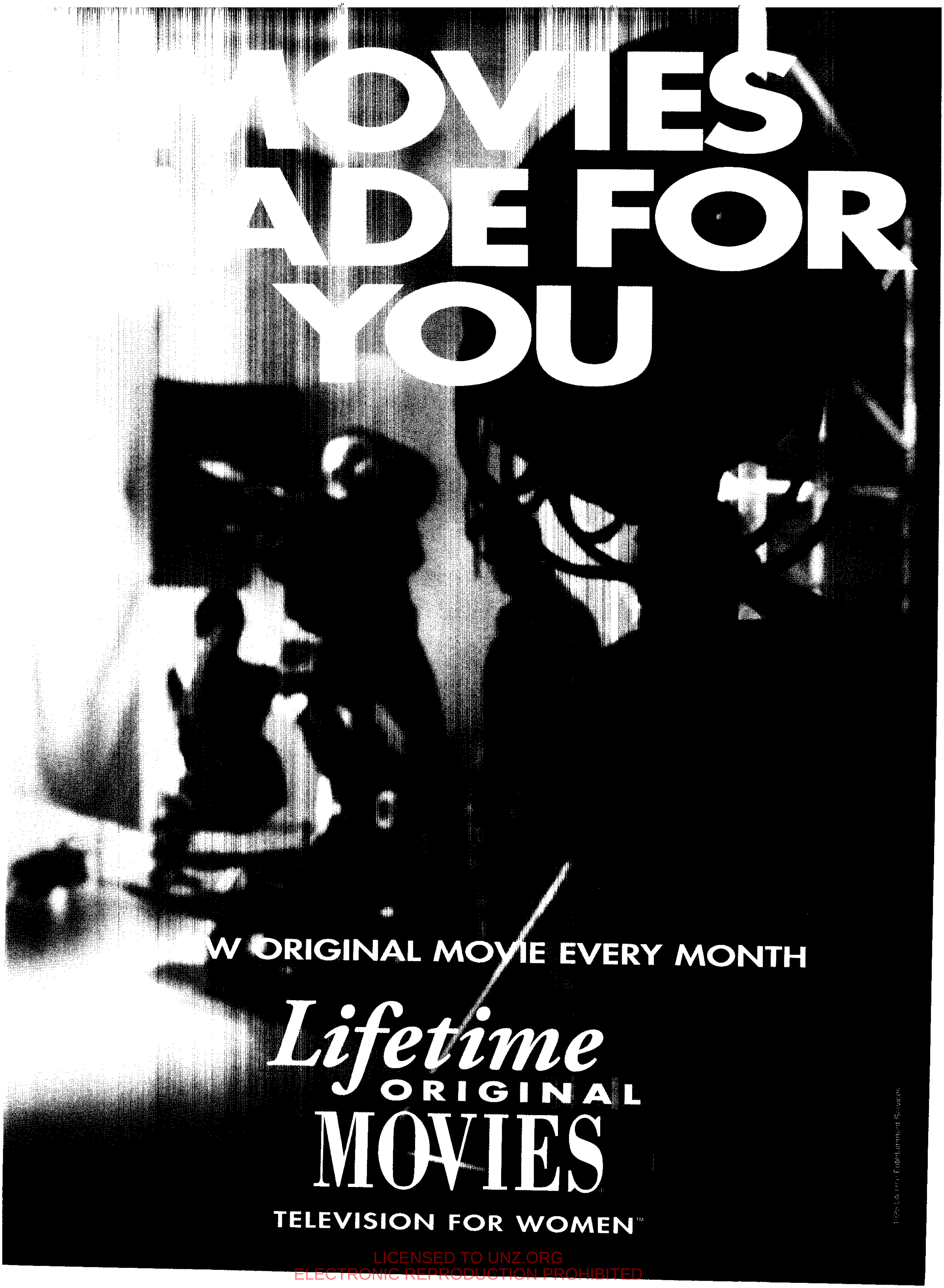
(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre addresses and phone numbers are listed on page 50.)

BALLOT MEASURE 9—Heather MacDonald's documentary, about the 1992 Oregon referendum that would have mandated anti-gay discrimination, recounts events in a clear, workmanlike style. While not much in the interviews with either side is surprising, the developing climate of hate that the movie records is unnerving: over the course of the campaign, violence against homosexuals increases dramatically. By the end of the film, when the measure is defeated, there seems little to celebrate.—B.D. (Film Forum; June 21-July 4.)

BATMAN FOREVER—A new Caped Crusader (Val Kilmer) gets help from Robin (Chris O'Donnell) against Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones) and the Riddler (Jim Carrey), in the latest picture dedicated to law and order in Gotham City. Also starring Nicole Kidman. Directed by Joel Schumacher. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

BRAVEHEART—Mel Gibson is the star, director, and co-producer of this hefty new epic, which lasts nearly three hours and covers more than thirty years of medieval Scottish history. He plays William Wallace, the hero with the thrash-metal hair who decides to make life hell for the Englishmen who are crawling all over his country. The political argument that ensues is pretty dull, but the battle scenes are the loudest and most convincing in years: Gibson has learned from Kurosawa in lending a clarifying thrust to what is, essentially, chaos. With Patrick McGoohan, Catherine McCormack, and Sophie Marceau.—A.L. (6/5/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, East 85th Street, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, and Lincoln Square.)

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY—You can't help wondering what a completely faithful adaptation of Robert James Waller's best-selling novel would have looked like: a sort of "Natural Born Lovers," presumably, full of swirling zoom shots and lunatic superimpositions. As it is, screenwriter Richard LaGravenese and director Clint Eastwood have turned out something sombre and restrained—almost, in fact, good (though it's too long). Eastwood also stars, as Kincaid, the strolling photographer who shows up at an Iowa farmhouse and falls for the lonely Francesca (Meryl Streep). The two leads' sly comic rhythm is miles removed from the book's flailing solemnity, though Eastwood has bravely given himself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the few ridiculous lines that survived.—A.L. (6/19/95) (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, Tower East, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

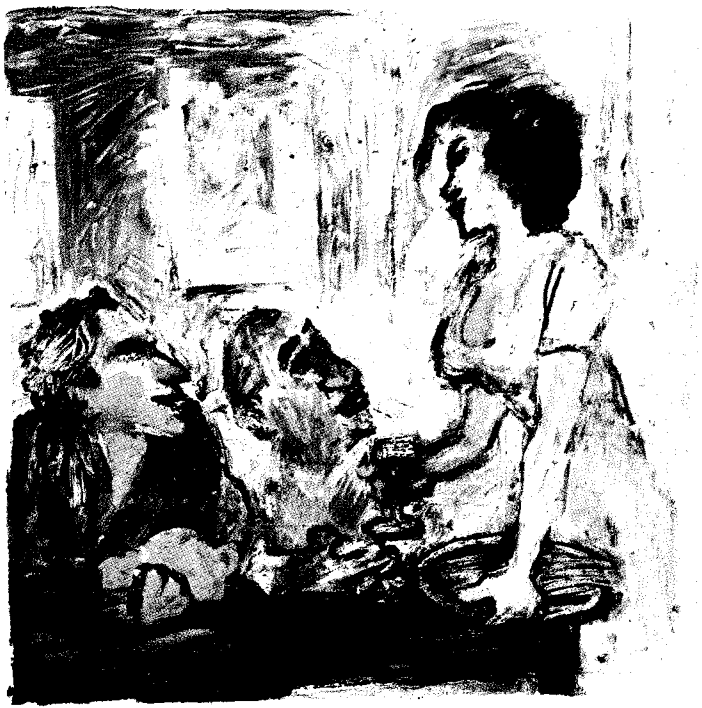
Casper—The story involves a dead mother, a lonely child, a grieving father, hidden treasure, and a dead-are-watching-over-us finale that's almost unbearable. But the production is a wonder of creamy Gaudi-inspired sets and computer-generated marvels. Brad Silberling, the director, gets very convincing performances from Christina Ricci and Bill Pullman, and he allows Casper and his three unruly uncles, Fatso, Stretch, and Stinkie, to steal the film.—B.D. (Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and National Twin.)

Congo—Laura Linney, Dylan Walsh, Ernie Hudson, and Tim Curry star in an action-adventure movie involving killer apes in Africa. Directed by Frank Marshall. Written by John Patrick Shanley, from Michael Crichton's 1980 novel. (19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

Crimson Tide—A doomsday thriller that reunites the infamous "Top Gun" team: producers Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer and director Tony Scott. It's a movie for people who really miss the Cold War. Russkies are on the rampage again, and the fate of the world hangs by its customary thread. Aboard the nuclear sub U.S.S. Alabama, the captain (Gene Hackman) and the executive officer (Denzel Washington) bicker and take turns relieving each other of command. The action is loud and flashy, but there isn't really much suspense. The movie operates in such well-charted waters that it feels less like a dangerous naval mission than like a luxury cruise: the accommodations are cozy and the activities carefully planned.—T.R. (5/15/95) (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema I, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

Crumb—Terry Zwigoff's brilliant, scary documentary about the underground-comics artist R. Crumb. While the film is reviewing Crumb's career, from its psychedelic-era heyday to the present, and following him as he goes about his everyday activities, it's also telling a harrowing story about his damaged family. The movie is often funny, but what makes it extraordinary is that it explores, without presuming to explain, the sources of a unique and savage comic sensibility. And it shows us that Crumb's gift—the detachment that allows him to create such hilariously contemptuous images of the world around him (and inside him)—is also a kind of curse, or, at least, a nasty habit.—T.R. (5/1/95) (Film Forum 3.)

Die Hard with a Vengeance—The third adventure with New York cop John McClane (Bruce Willis), the sweaty, blue-collar American counterpart of James Bond; once again, McClane gets his undershirt dirty foiling the schemes of a world-class megalomaniac (here, Jeremy Irons). John McTiernan—who directed the original "Die Hard" (1988) but sat out the first sequel—has returned, and his professionalism gives the series a lift. But if this picture is any indication, the ultimate fate of all action-movie series may be to become perfectly indistinguishable from one another. McTiernan supplies one climax after another, but when the whole intense, meaningless experience is over, you may have trouble putting a name or a face to the movie that just had its way with you. With Samuel L. Jackson.—T.R. (5/29/95) (Murray Hill Cinemas, Baronet, Coronet, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)



Massimo Troisi, Philippe Noiret, and Maria Grazia Cucinotta in "The Postman."

RITA HEALY

The Glass Shield—The writer-director Charles Burnett ("Killer of Sheep," "To Sleep with Anger") uses the cop-thriller form to make a moving and emotionally acute drama of self-knowledge. The hero, J. J. Johnson (Michael Boatman), is an eager, idealistic young cop assigned to an L.A. County Sheriff's station; he's the first black man ever to serve there. J.J. is caught in a no man's land: members of his own community look at him as if he were a traitor, and the angry white men he works with consider him an outsider. The movie's early scenes are dominated by Boatman's brilliant performance as a man who, in the attempt to be all things to all people, becomes a mystery to himself. Later, as J.J. begins to uncover evidence of corruption, the film's scope widens, but the director's lucid style never falters. In Burnett's hands, this story (which was inspired by the real-life experiences of a black deputy) dramatizes a simple and profoundly political idea: you can't know yourself until you know what you're a part of. In its quiet way, this is the most subversive American movie in years. Also with Lori Petty, Richard Anderson, Ice Cube, Bernie Casey, Michael Ironside, M. Emmet Walsh, and Elliott Gould.—T.R. (6/12/95) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, 62nd & Broadway, and Embassy 1.)

The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love—Writer-director Maria Maggenti's first feature tells the story of two high-schoolers (Laurel Hollomon and Nicole Parker) who fall for each other. (Angelika Film Center and Carnegie Hall Cinemas.)

Johnny Mnemonic—The hero (Keanu Reeves) is a twenty-first-century information courier, whose surgically reconfigured brain can be hooked up directly to computers. At the beginning, Johnny accepts a shipment that's much too large for his storage capacity, and, to make matters worse, no one has the complete access code to retrieve the data in his head; if he doesn't download within twenty-four hours, he'll die. He's up the information creek without a paddle. It's a nice premise, and the script, by the cyberpunk pioneer William Gibson, embellishes it ingeniously. But Robert Longo—an artist and music-video auteur making his début as a feature-film director—drains the life out of the story. The action feels inert, and the movie's vision of the future seems to have been assembled from rusted scraps of eighties science-fiction pictures like "Blade Runner" and "Escape from New York." The performances—by a cast that includes Ice-T, Dina Meyer, Dolph Lundgren, Barbara Sukowa, and Henry Rollins—are worthy of an Ed Wood ensemble.—T.R. (6/12/95) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin.)

Little Odessa—Joshua the hit man (Tim Roth) returns to the Russian section of Brooklyn on a job, and for the first time in years he links up with his family: his mopey younger brother (Edward Furlong), his dying mother (Vanessa Redgrave), and his disapproving, belt-wielding father (Maximilian Schell). The writer and director, James Gray, draws formidable work from his cast. This potent, cheerless movie gets to you, and gets you down. It's one for a rainy day.—A.L. (Village Theatre VII, Eastside Playhouse, Quad Cinema, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

A Little Princess—Alfonso Cuarón's film, based on a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, is one of the rare children's movies that don't merely pay lip service to the imagination but actually use it. The script presents the battle of youthful fancy against adult "realism" as a kind of epic struggle; the antagonists are Sara Crewe (Liesel Matthews), a bright, happy, exuberantly creative girl, and Miss Minchin (Eleanor Bron), a boarding-school headmistress who is a ruthless downsizer of her pupils' imaginations. The message, spoken by Sara, is "*All* girls are little princesses," and, although that may sound a bit sticky, this funny, lively, stirring movie makes us believe it.—T.R. (5/29/95) (Gemini and Olympia.)

Mad Love—Matt (Chris O'Donnell), a Seattle high-school senior, falls in love with Casey (Drew Barrymore), the wild new girl at school; once they escape and head for Mexico, Matt has to admit that Casey gets a little weird without her medication. By the end, the movie could be an infomercial for psychopharmacology. O'Donnell is especially touching as a love-starved but honorable boy. Written by Paula Milne; directed by Antonia Bird.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, and Olympia. . . . ¶ Guild; through June 22.)

Party Girl—As Mary, a trendy downtown New Yorker forced by circumstances to work as a library clerk, Parker Posey is on her way to creating a new female comic persona: wiry, hyperactive, tough, and insensitive, but somehow sympathetic. The hilarious script, co-written by first-time director Daisy von Scherler Mayer and Harry Birckmayer, is about growing up. With Omar Townsend as the Lebanese falafel vender Mary has a crush on, and the director's mother, Sasha von Scherler, as her disapproving godmother.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

The Postman—A drama about a fisherman's son (the late Massimo Troisi) who delivers mail to Pablo Neruda (Philippe Noiret) on a southern Italian island, where the Chilean poet lived in exile during the early nineteen-fifties. With Maria Grazia Cucinotta. Directed by Michael Radford. In Italian. (Angelika Film Center, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Pushing Hands—In 1992, before he made "The Wedding Banquet" and "Eat Drink Man Woman," Ang Lee wrote and directed this drama about a seventy-year-old widowed

The McCooeys

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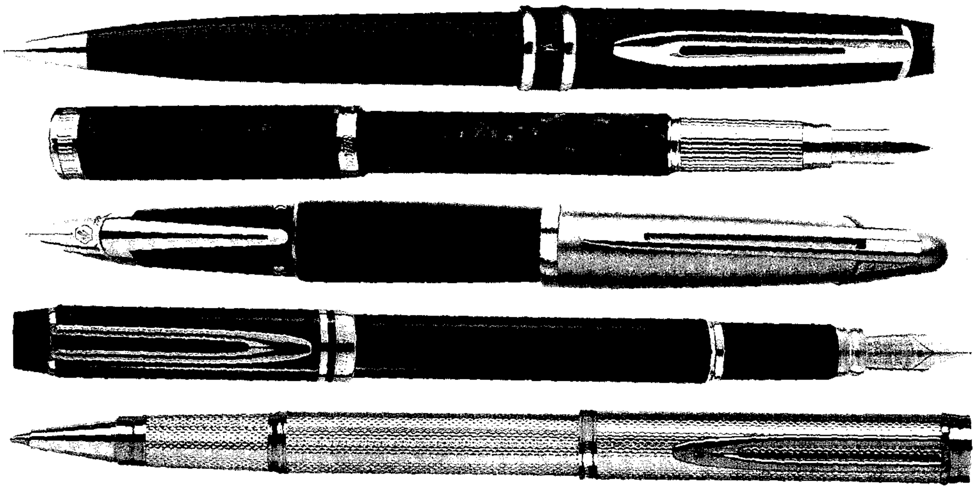

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Tai Chi master (Sihung Lung) who leaves Beijing to live with his son's family in suburban New York. (Angelika 57.)

Smoke—Five years ago, the director Wayne Wang asked the novelist Paul Auster to work up one of his stories as a screenplay. The result—a highly cerebral intertwining of the lives of white and black characters in Brooklyn in 1990, centering on a cigar-store owner (Harvey Keitel) and a lonely writer (William Hurt)—is obviously a labor of love. But Wang's sentimentality and Auster's self-consciousness don't go together: the direction is literal, and the lines sound like short-story dialogue read aloud. Only Forest Whitaker, playing a guilty father, comes off well. A gorgeous sequence that runs behind the final credits—with no dialogue, just a song by Tom Waits—suggests what the film *might* have been. With Harold Perrineau, Jr., Stockard Channing, and Ashley Judd.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Tales from the Hood—Clarence Williams III plays the bug-eyed master of ceremonies in this Spike Lee-produced comic horror anthology with a predominantly black cast. The tales are tired, the humor negligible, and the victims (including a David Duke-like politician and some racist cops) easy targets. Directed by Rusty Cundieff.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, Manhattan Twin, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

While You Were Sleeping—Sandra Bullock is a sad and lonely subway clerk (yeah, right) who drags a handsome customer (Peter Gallagher) away from an oncoming train. She's in love with him, but he's in a coma, and his brother (Bill Pullman) falls in love with *her*. Out of this pleasing confusion the director, Jon Turteltaub, has fashioned something so simple and predictable that you have no option but to submit. Bullock knows one of the secrets of doing romantic comedy: treating the romance as a good joke.—A.L. (5/22/95) (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Cinema II, and Embassy.)

Wigstock: The Movie—The "Lady" Bunny has been organizing New York's drag festival for a decade now, and what began as a small wigs-and-heels gathering in Tompkins Square Park has grown into a major get-your-hot-dogs-here event. Barry Shils's record of the 1993-94 celebrations captures some of its style and playfulness—Joey Arias singing a Billie Holiday tune, Jackie Beat outfitted as the heir to Divine's designs, Lypsinka strutting across the stage like an escapee from a fifties Amana Radar Range demonstration. What's on-screen, though, could pretty much have been captured on anyone's camcorder, and the editing and directorial cues seem to have been taken from public-access television. The performers have character; the movie doesn't.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE BASKETBALL DIARIES: Village East Cinemas. . . . **BULLETS OVER BROADWAY** (reviewed in our issue of 10/31/94): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BURNT BY THE SUN** (5/8/95): Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **CLERKS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DOLORES CLAIBORNE** (4/3/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DON JUAN DE MARCO** (4/10/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE ENGLISHMAN WHO WENT UP A HILL BUT CAME DOWN A MOUNTAIN** (5/15/95): Village East Cinemas, Sutton, and Cinema 3. . . . **EXOTICA:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **FARINELLI:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **FLUKE:** 19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Waverly, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center. . . . **FORGET PARIS** (5/22/95): Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, Beekman, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center. . . . **FRENCH KISS** (5/22/95): Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Gotham Cinema, 86th Street East Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, Regency, and Embassy. . . . **FRIDAY:** Criterion Center. . . . **JEFFERSON IN PARIS:** Paris. . . . **KISS OF DEATH** (5/1/95): Manhattan Twin. . . . **LOVE AND HUMAN REMAINS:** Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE MYSTERY OF RAMPO:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **ONCE WERE WARRIORS:** Plaza. . . . **PANTHER:** Movieland 8th Street Triplex. . . . **THE PEREZ FAMILY:** First & 62nd Cinemas and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . **PICTURE BRIDE:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **PRIEST** (3/27/95): Village East Cinemas, 68th St. Playhouse, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . **ROB ROY** (4/17/95): 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **STALINGRAD:** Quad Cinema. . . . **STRAWBERRY AND CHOCOLATE:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SWIMMING WITH SHARKS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TWO DAUGHTERS:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **WINGS OF COURAGE** (4/24/95): Lincoln Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000).
Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171).
Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th (477-6600).
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th (982-0400).
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th (924-3363).
Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th (529-6799).
19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th (260-8000).
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th (689-6548).
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th (532-5544).
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th (683-0255).
Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th (755-3020).
Sutton 1 and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th (759-1411).
Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th (759-2262).
Plaza, 42 E. 58th (355-3320).
Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th (935-6420).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th (759-4630).
Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th (355-1663).
Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th (753-6022).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd (513-5408).
Gemini 1 and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th (832-1670).
Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th (737-2622).
New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th (744-7339).
68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th (734-0302).
Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st (879-1313).
East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th (249-5100).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th (534-1880).
Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th (876-2400).
86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th (249-1144).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110).
Waverly 1 and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd (929-8037).
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th (929-3350).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th (255-8800).
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd (513-5402).
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd (989-0060).
Guild, 33 W. 50th (757-2406).
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St., between 8th and 9th Aves. (504-0960).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th (765-7600).
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th (265-2520).
Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th (586-1900).
Paris, 4 W. 58th (980-5656).
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th (752-5959).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd (265-7466).
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd (757-2280).
Regency, B'way at 67th (724-3700).
Lincoln Square, B'way at 68th (336-5000).
84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th (877-3600).
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th (222-1200).
Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th (865-8128).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th (354-0900).
Embassy 1, B'way at 46th (302-0494).
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th (730-7262).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way (869-8340).
National Twin, B'way at 44th (869-0950).

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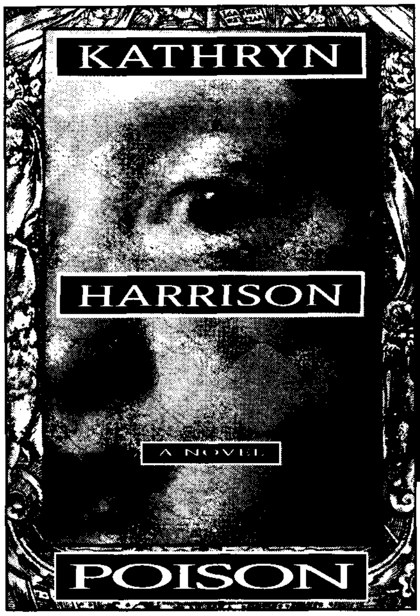
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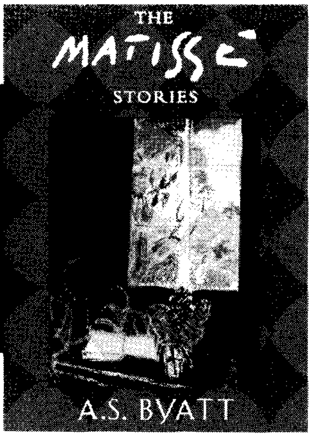
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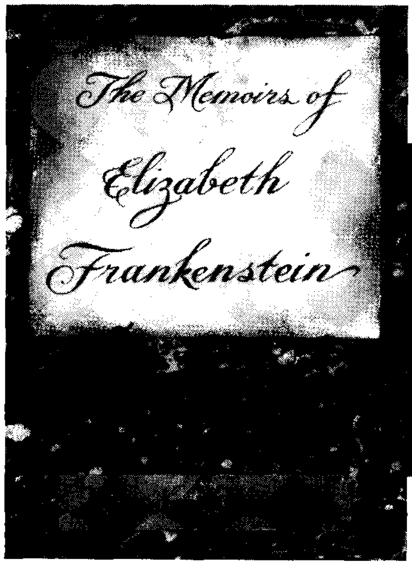
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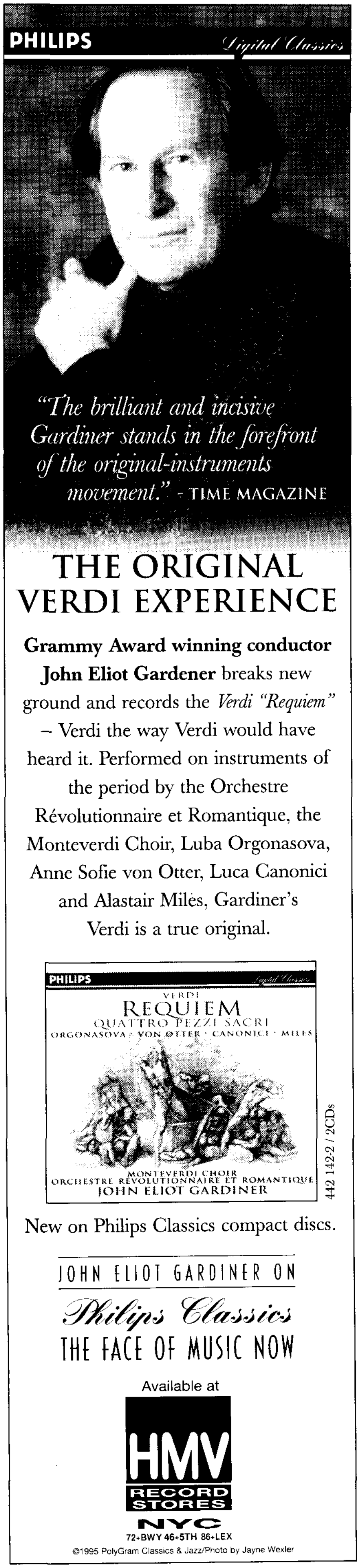

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REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Arsenal (1929)—The writer-director Alexander Dovzhenko was the poet of the Russian revolutionary film movement—a poet whose startling imagery had a heat and pitch and lyricism that Eisenstein and Pudovkin never approached. This classic film, set during the war of 1914, is an original and experimental celebration of social revolution. Silent.—P.K. (Anthology Film Archives; July 1.)

Devi (1962)—Satyajit Ray's dreamily sensual, ironic film, about a wealthy man who convinces his son's bride (Sharmila Tagore) that she is an incarnation of the goddess Kali, has startling Freudian undertones. Ray's feeling for the intoxicating beauty within the disintegrating way of life of the nineteenth-century landowning class makes this one of the rare honest films about decadence. In Bengali.—P.K. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas; starting June 30.)

Earth (1930)—The specific subject is collectivization, but Dovzhenko's masterwork is a passionate lyric on the continuity of man, death, and nature. The theme is perhaps most startlingly expressed in a sequence about a man who has just celebrated the arrival of a tractor. He starts to dance—for sheer love of life—on his way home, and as he dances in the middle of the moonlit road he is suddenly struck by a bullet. Silent.—P.K. (Anthology Film Archives; June 30.)

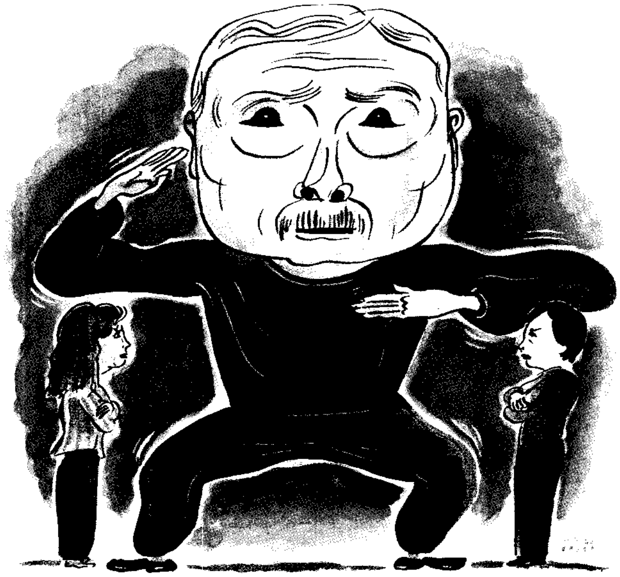
The Garden of the Finzi-Continis (1970)—Vittorio De Sica's lyric evocation of a vanished group of people (the cultivated, aristocratic Jewish-Italian landowners) and a vanished mood. Based on Giorgio Bassani's semi-autobiographical novel, the film records how Giorgio, a middle-class outsider (Lino Capolicchio), is drawn into the decaying, enchanted world of the Finzi-Continis by the imperious, contrary Micòl (Dominique Sanda); she and her languid brother (Helmut Berger) are spoiled, beautiful people without the will to save themselves. This extraordinary film, with its melancholy glamour, is perhaps the only one that records the halfhearted anti-Jewish measures of the Mussolini period—which were, however, sufficient to wipe out the Finzi-Continis and all they represent. In Italian.—P.K. (Public Theatre; June 25.)

I Remember Mama (1948)—Kathryn Forbes' novel about her Norwegian family in San Francisco is used as the framework for a mother image of formidable proportions. This image is held to with the serene nostalgia that we reserve for our very best fantasies—Mama (Irene Dunne) is tall and beautiful, wise and omniscient. Except for a few gooey lapses (the worst is a bathetic hospital scene), George Stevens directed with warmth and intelligence; it's not a bad movie, though it has a too careful look, with meticulous reconstructions of San Francisco streets circa 1905-10.—P.K. (Metropolitan Museum of Art; June 23-24. . . . ¶ Museum of Modern Art; July 2.)

The Italian Straw Hat (1927)—René Clair took the Eugène Labiche and Marc Michel play that Bergson used to illustrate his theory of comedy and turned it into a model of visual wit. This silent satire on middle-class pretension is so expertly timed and so elegantly directed that farce becomes ballet.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; July 1-2.)

Laura (1944)—Everybody's favorite chic murder mystery. Gene Tierney is the dead girl who ends up as the heroine; Clifton Webb and Vincent Price are her suitors; Dana Andrews is the charmingly necrophiliac detective; and Judith Anderson is modishly contemptible. Directed by Otto Preminger. —P.K. (Whitney Museum; June 25 and June 28-30.)

Mädchen in Uniform (1932)—A willowy young girl (Herthe Thiele) in a fashionable school is unhappy under the harsh, Prussian discipline; she flowers when a sympathetic, understanding teacher (Dorothea Wieck) gives her special consideration. This consideration is ambiguous and certainly sensual. The teacher is not viewed as decadent, or even naughty; she appears to be on the side of the liberal, humanitarian angels, yet she seems unmistakably lesbian. This legendary film was directed by Leontine Sagon from Christa Winsloe's play "Yesterday and Today"—one of the few occasions in film history when a woman writer's material has also been directed by a woman. The picture is always described as sensitive, and it is; it's also a rather loaded piece of special pleading. In German.—P.K. (A Different Light Bookstore; July 1.)



Sihung Lung in "Pushing Hands."

MARCELLUS HALL

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—Through June 22: "The Wind" (1928, Victor Sjöström; silent). . . . ¶ June 23-July 4: "Foxy Brown" (1974, Jack Hill), with Pam Grier.

Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)—The Public's annual Italian summer festival starts on June 22 and continues through July 13. This year's program, "Italia 1900-1939," includes silent films, films from the thirties, and more recent films whose action takes place between 1900 and 1939, such as "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis," reviewed above.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—June 22 at 2:30, 6, and 8; June 23 at 2:30 and 6; June 24-25 at 2 and 5; and June 26-27 at 2:30 and 6: Swedish films directed by Alf Sjöberg. . . . ¶ June 22 at 3 and 6: "When Billy Broke His Head . . . and Other Tales of Wonder" (1994, Billy Golfus). . . . ¶ June 26-27 at 3 and 6; June 30 at 3, 6, and 8; July 1 at 3 and 5; July 2 at 12:30 and 5; July 3 at 1, 3, and 6; and July 4 at 3 and 5: Sixteen programs of short films produced by the United Nations. . . . ¶ June 29 at 3 and 6: "Morocco Past and Present" (1995, Steven Montgomery), "Haze" (1993, Tim Bridwell), and "Boujad: A Nest in the Heat" (1992, Hakim Belabbes). . . . ¶ A series of films made from Broadway plays. June 30 at 2:30:

"Stage Door" (1937, Gregory La Cava). . . . June 30 at 6: "The Member of the Wedding" (1952, Fred Zinnemann). . . . June 30 at 8:15: "Dodsworth" (1936, William Wyler). . . . July 1 at 1 and July 4 at 5: "Ah, Wilderness!" (1935, Clarence Brown). . . . July 1 at 3 and July 4 at 2:30: "Our Town" (1940, Sam Wood). . . . July 1 at 5: "The Happy Time" (1953, Richard Fleischer). . . . July 2 at 12:30: "I Remember Mama" (†). . . . July 2 at 3: "The Strawberry Blonde" (1941, Raoul Walsh). . . . July 2 at 5 and July 3 at 2:30: "Peg o' My Heart" (1922, King Vidor). . . . July 3 at 6: "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" (1940, John Cromwell).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—Through the afternoon of June 30: The 1995 Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, with films by Costa-Gavras, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Carol Jacobsen, and many others. . . . ¶ From the evening of June 30: French comedies, from the silent era to the present, will be shown for the next six weeks. "The Italian Straw Hat" is reviewed above. . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. July 24-25 at 11: Three Swedish short films. . . . July 1-2 at 2: "The Littlest Rebel" (1935, David Butler), with Shirley Temple.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—A series of films directed by, starring, and/or written by Erich von Stroheim. June 24 at 2: "Three Faces East" (1930, Roy Del Ruth). . . . June 24 at 4: "Hello, Sister!" (1933). . . . June 25 at 2: "The Lost Squadron" (1932, George Archainbaud). . . . June 25 at 3:30: "The Crime of Dr. Crespi" (1935, John Auer). . . . June 25 at 5: "Between Two Women" (1936, George B. Seitz). . . . July 1 at 2: "La Grande Illusion" (1937, Jean Renoir; in French). . . . July 1 at 4:30: "I Was an Adventuress" (1940, Gregory Ratoff). . . . July 2 at 2: "Five Graves to Cairo" (1943, Billy Wilder). . . . July 2 at 4: "Sunset Boulevard" (1950, Wilder).

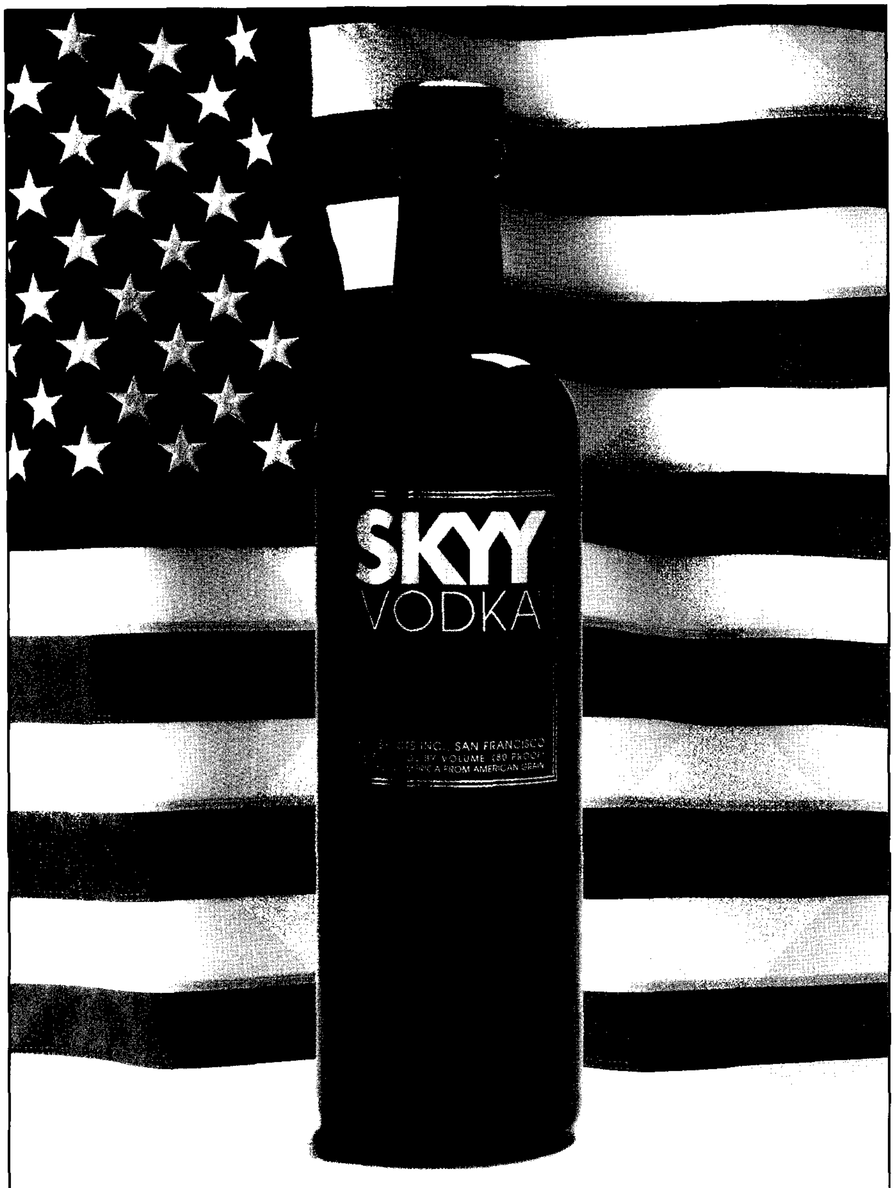
A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Saturday- and Sunday-night series of free films. On June 25 at 7, the feature will be "Can't Stop the Music" (1980, Nancy Walker); on July 1 at 7, "Mädchen in Uniform" (†); on July 2 at 7, "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1951, Elia Kazan).

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (570-3949)—June 23-24 at 7: "I Remember Mama" (†).

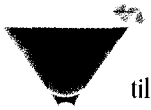
Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with Looney Tunes and coming attractions. The feature on June 26 will be "Anatomy of a Murder" (1959, Otto Preminger); on July 3, "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). (Rain date is the following night.)

Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—June 22 at 2:30 and 6:15 and June 23-24 at 1:30 and 4: "East of Borneo" (1931, George Melford) and "Rose Hobart" (1939, Joseph Cornell). . . . ¶ June 25, June 28, and June 30 at 1:30 and June 29 at 6:15: "Loose Ends" (1979, Chick Strand) and "Eureka" (1974, Ernie Gehr). . . . ¶ June 25, June 28, and June 30 at 4 and June 29 at 2:30: "Laura" (†). . . . ¶ July 1-2 at 1:30: "The Naked City" (1948, Jules Dassin). . . . ¶ July 1-2 at 4: "Masculine Feminine" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—June 23 at 8, June 24 at 6 and 8, June 25 at 4, June 30 at 8, and July 1 at 6: Films from the collection of the late Willard Van Dyke. . . . ¶ June 24 at 5: Super 8 films by Milena Gierke. . . . ¶ June 25 at 6: Films by Louis and August Lumière. . . . ¶ Three films by Alexander Dovzhenko. June 25 at 8: "Zvenigora" (1928). . . . June 30 at 10: "Earth" (†). . . . July 1 at 10: "Arsenal" (†). . . . ¶ July 1 at 5: "Commute" (1992, Bruce Baillie). . . . ¶ July 1-2 at 8: Films by Joseph Cornell. . . . ¶ July 2 at 4: Two films by Paul Sharits. . . . ¶ July 2 at 9:30: "The Parson's Widow" (1921, Carl Dreyer; silent).



Take the 5th.



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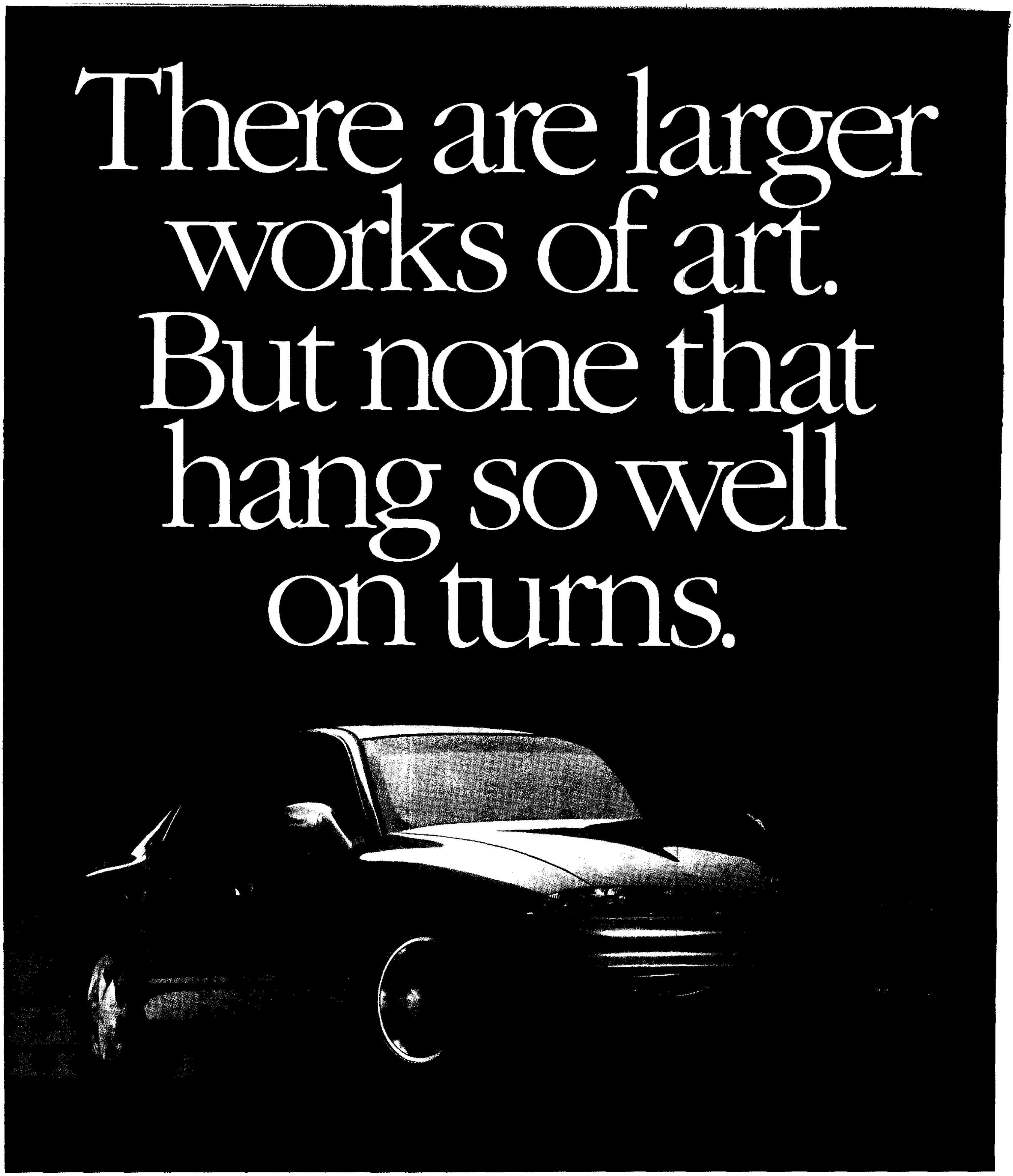
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

BOOK LOVERS

LEXINGTON BAR & BOOKS—on Lexington between Seventy-second and Seventy-third—has about two thousand books in it. They are not for sale. There is also plenty of liquor, which is. The books fill ten gentlemen's-club-style bookcases that accompany fifteen bar tables. It's 9 P.M. on a Monday. Up front, there are French windows that open onto the street. The theme from "Thunderball" is playing softly for half a dozen people at a black bar with gold sparkles in it. "This is the most attractive gin mill in New York," a man in a pale-gray suit says, as if the fate of every metropolitan enterprise were in his hands. "It's super enough that my pals held my bachelor party here."

"The lighting is nice," a blond woman in a pink suit says. "You can sit and meet someone. It's a little more discreet than a singles' bar."

"Did you ever read a book here?"

"I read a book at *that* table," the man in the pale-gray suit says, pointing to a small empty table against the wall.

"I almost read a book," the woman in the pink suit says.

"What was the last novel you read?"

" 'The Bridges of Madison County,' " the man says, and laughs a very loud laugh. He calms down rather abruptly. "That's not true. It's a crock. I'm reading 'The Day After Tomorrow.' "

"Which I threw out the window of my car," the woman in the pink suit says.

"What exactly did you read in here?"

"Nobody who had a brain in their body would *read* in here," he says.

"I wish they had European magazines you could flip through," the woman says.

The bartender—tall, young, blond—is asked what he's been reading lately.

" 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' " he answers promptly. "A friend of mine's named Dorian. He's forty-seven, as it is now."

Mark Grossich, forty, one of Lexington Bar & Books' owners, says that "The Catcher in the Rye" is his favorite novel: "It just kind of captures the spirit of my generation."

"Do you have it here?"

"Probably somewhere. I can't say for sure we do."

A man standing next to Mr. Grossich says, with pride, "I'm from Oak Park, the birthplace of Hemingway."

"Do you have a favorite Hemingway book?"

" 'The Old Man and the Sea,' " he says, and adds, with a sigh of unmitigated relief, "I knew those college arts classes would come in handy someday."

"I have a great Ted Kennedy story, if anyone wants to listen," the man in the pale-gray suit says. There is a silence.

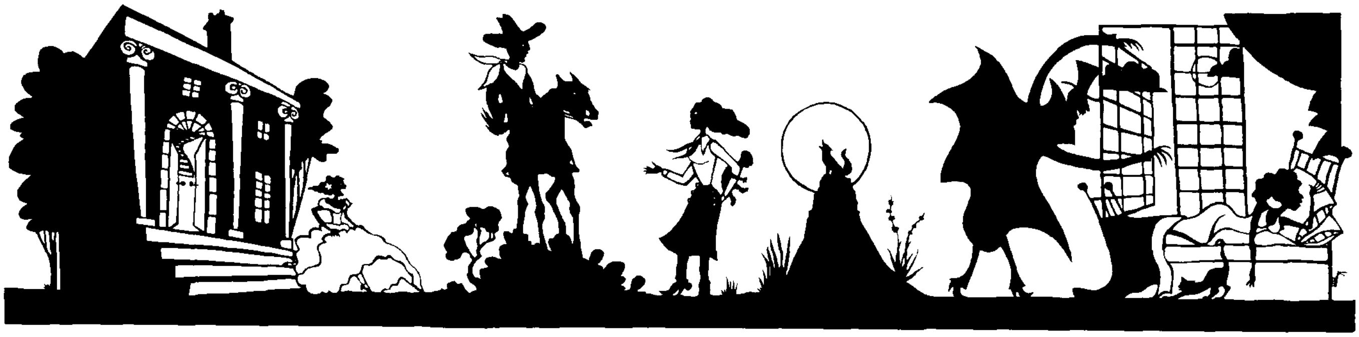
"I'm trying to be *droll*," he says. "We didn't come here for the deep truth."

"Do you think this is the death of civilization?"

Another silence. Then he says, more slowly, "Nobody comes here to read." And, almost inaudibly, "It's too *dark*."

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

For its centennial, the New York Public Library asked local librarians to select the Books of the Century. The top hundred and fifty-nine books were then rendered by Diana Bryan in a mural, now on display at the Research Library, on Forty-second Street. Below, a selection of twelve memorable titles.



"Gone with the Wind" *"Riders of the Purple Sage"* *"Dracula"*

FAY WELDON ON FEELING DREADFUL

THE sun beams like a giant spotlight through the back windows of Fay Weldon's house, in London's Hampstead. The novelist, a bobbing round head on a medicine-ball body, often encircles space with her arms as if delineating her circle of expertise. As a writer, she works with small, concentrated units of destructive power. With her previous novel "Affliction" (it's entitled "Trouble" in America), the fallout created a furor that spread beyond the literary pages. Weldon and her husband divorced after he fell under the spell of a therapist-slash-astrologer who was counselling him. The therapist decreed that he and Weldon were astrologically misaligned (he Gemini, she Virgo), whereupon he turned his back on their thirty-year marriage. Understandably, Weldon felt betrayed, and, when Fay Weldon feels betrayed, clear the planet: not only was "Affliction" a naked attack on the sham solicitude and unctuous piety of the shrink-as-guru, but its author went public in the press about the whole affair. Before long, snoopy reporters were turning up outside the house; at one point, a child guest of Weldon's tried to ward them off by squirting toilet cleanser out the window.

Although Weldon shoos away talk of the controversy now, she clearly prefers a hard battle to what she sees as a repressive chill that has crossed the Atlantic regarding fiction. "People are very frightened in the States and, increasingly, here, of being presented with any ideas that they don't have already," she says. She regrets that some readers and reviewers want fiction to be a pacifier representing "an ideal life" rather than rough patches of maturity. She blames the culture of therapy for this turn of events. "What is the matter with feeling dreadful? I mean, it seems to be the human condition. It is normal and natural to be ridden by guilt, by jealousy and misery."

Her latest novel, "Splitting," just published by The Atlantic Monthly Press, turns jealousy and misery into fissionable material. When the protagonist, Angelica Rice, flies to pieces after her aristocrat cad of a husband leaves her financially dry, those pieces assume identities of their own. Her heroine becomes a multiple personality, whose different selves radio to one another inside her head. Women by their very nature are plural, Weldon says. "Every time you open your wardrobe, you look at your clothes and you wonder what you are going to wear. What you are really saying is 'Who am I going to be today?' And you sort of fish them out, and sometimes they don't go home."

"Splitting" is itself split. Weldon wrote two versions of the novel, one for England and one for America, the American version less allegorical and what she calls more "whiplashy." The ravening velocity of Weldon's writing and the way she pops surrealism into the story like a cinematic device make her more attuned to the American metabolism than, say, the quiet pursuits of Anita Brookner or Joanna Trollope are. Lamenting that the ideal in England today is to find cozy pockets of comfort and low stress, Weldon says, "I *like* stress, you know, even if it kills me."

PUTTING IT OFF

Four writers on avoiding the typewriter:

ALICE MUNRO: We live in an old, fairly big house, and I was brought up to be a good housewife—not to be a good writer. I'm a very good surface cleaner, and I keep things up pretty well. But there's apt to be chaos underneath—in the backs of closets or cupboards—and it's the knowledge of this chaos which I use to keep myself from writing. I can get into housework very, very quickly, because I get a whole lot of virtuous feelings not from writing but from cleaning.

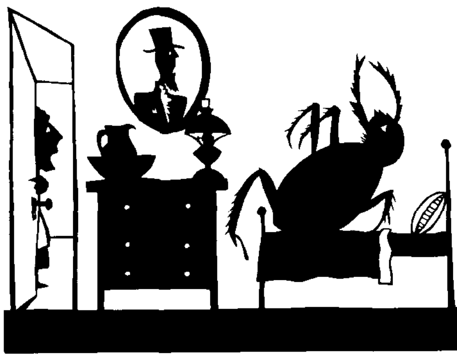
JAMES ELLROY: This pit bull's biting me in the ass at all times. More specifically, it is my ex-wife's bullterrier, Barko, whom I've anthropomorphized. He visits frequently and torments me if I don't write.

Nothing really competes with the work. My marriage, a few interests—I get the big bone for boxing and dogs and classical music. But I rarely go to the movies, and I don't have that many friends, and if I'm not with my wife or working I like to brood. Lie in the dark. Drink some cold coffee. Think about my dog.

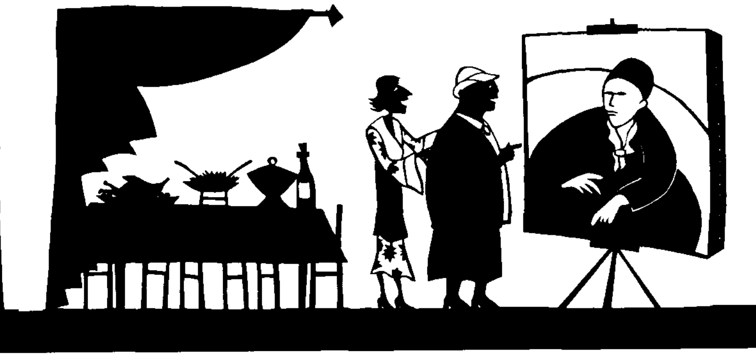
MARY GAITSKILL: First, I have to eat breakfast and meditate. My cats will get bored if I don't play with them. I may have to clean a spot off the rug.

I don't think I'm ever going to be a fabulously productive person. Sometimes I pace around the room while listening to loud music like Courtney Love or Mudhoney, which I find inspiring. James Brown has been very helpful.

WILLIAM GADDIS: Sometimes I suspect I'm repairing a doorknob because I really would rather not sit down at the typewriter. And yet when you're repairing the doorknob you're haunted by what you're working on. Sometimes, for instance, I have an idea that is still not quite clear, so I let the thing develop even when I'm watching, say, Joel McCrea in an old Western. To feel that this is the wrong activity or that it's dangerous is a bad thing and can get you down. The work can often be drudgery, of course, terrible drudgery—especially a long book. But a pipe fitter must also have times of despair.



"The Metamorphosis"



"Tender Buttons: Objects Food Rooms"

"To the Lighthouse"

HUMOR HUDDLE

"WHITHER MIRTH?" was the topic under discussion by a group of wits and humorists gathered under the auspices of *The Paris Review* at the Hawthornden Literary Institute Retreat—a quaint mock fortress on Lake Como—a couple of weeks ago. Drue Heinz, the philanthropist and the director of the institute, was the host of the proceedings. Roy Blount, Jr., and Calvin Trillin represented the United States. A British contingent was considerably larger: it included Lord Gowrie, Malcolm Bradbury, Auberon Waugh, John Mortimer, Tibor Fischer, John Gross, John Wells, and, finally, Mordecai Richler, who is a Canadian but lives in London.

In Act II, Scene 2, Hamlet mourns, "I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth." There was no evidence of such a loss during the proceedings at the retreat. At one of the gatherings after dinner, John Mortimer, the multifaceted author known particularly for his Horace Rumpole series of courtroom mysteries, rose to read from a newspaper item that showed how easily a perfectly respectable person could slide into being a murderer. The account was from the Edinburgh *Evening News* of August 18, 1978. "I don't know, but this may come in handy for you in the study of comedy," Mortimer said. "Here it is."

> While they were waiting at a bus stop in Clerimston, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Thirsty were threatened by Mr. Robert Clear. "He demanded that I give him my wife's purse," said Mr. Thirsty. "Telling him that the purse was in her basket, I bent down, put my hands up her skirt, detached her artificial leg and hit him over the head with it. It was not my intention to do any more than frighten him off but, unhappily for us all, he died."

While the laughter subsided, Mortimer rummaged in a folder and produced a piece culled from a book of true stories. "This one," he told his audience, "is about an extremely unsuccessful murderer."

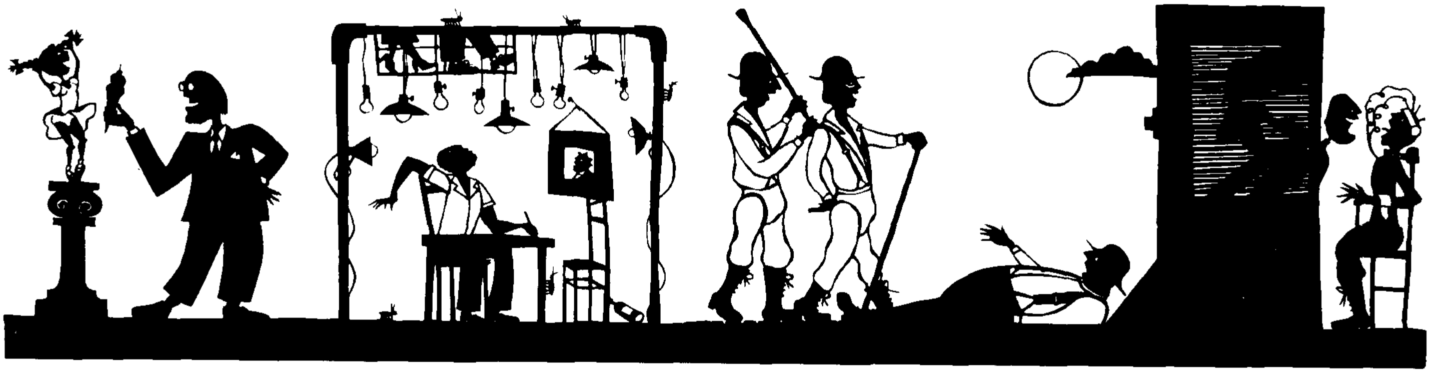
> Dwarfing all known records for matrimonial homicide, Mr. Peter Scott of Southsea made seven attempts to kill his wife without her once noticing that anything was wrong. In 1980 he took out an insurance policy on his good lady which would bring him £250,000 in the event of her accidental death. Soon afterwards, he placed a lethal dose of mercury in her strawberry flan, but it all rolled out. Not wishing to waste this deadly substance he next stuffed her mackerel with the entire contents of the bottle. This time she ate it, but with no side effects whatsoever. Warming to the task, he then took his better half on holiday to Yugoslavia. Recommending the panoramic views, he invited her to sit on the edge of a cliff. She declined to do so, prompted by what she later described as some "sixth sense." The same occurred only weeks later when he urged her to savour the view from Beachy Head. When his spouse was in bed with chicken-pox he started a fire outside her bedroom door, but some interfering busybody put it out. Undeterred, he started another fire and burnt down the entire flat. The wife of his bosom escaped uninjured. Another time he asked her to stand in the middle of the road so that he could drive towards her and check if his brakes were working. At no time did Mrs. Scott feel that the magic had gone out of their marriage. Since it appeared nothing short of a small nuclear bomb would have alerted this good woman to her husband's intentions, he eventually gave up and confessed everything to the police. After the case a detective said Mrs. Scott had been "absolutely shattered" when told of her husband's plot to kill her. "She had not twigged it at all and was dumbstruck."

"Well, there you are," Mortimer said. "This is life. What I've found as a writer is that you have to keep taming it down, making it less improbable in order to fit it into some sort of fictional context. Wouldn't you agree?"

THE PURE PRIMACY OF WORDS

GEORGE HEARN, who recently added a Tony, for his current role as Max the Butler in "Sunset Boulevard," to a shelf that already includes another one, for "La Cage aux Folles," and an Emmy, for "Sweeney Todd," was sitting in his dressing room in the Minskoff Theatre the other day, discussing the greatest achievement of his career—at least, according to his younger sister, Nancy, whose judgment in this regard he appears to savor. A year and a half ago, when Hearn was first crafting his incarnation of Max during "Sunset Boulevard" 's Los Angeles run, he was also taking a few hours off several times a week to squirrel himself away in a sound studio, where a small team from Pacific Palisades-based Cathedral Audio Books was taping his heartrending rendition of Michael Shaara's classic 1974 Gettysburg novel, "The Killer Angels." The reading—which was unabridged, took two months to complete, and eventually yielded a jumbo nine-cassette, thirteen-hour package—called forth from Hearn an astonishing range of emotions, from blissful exaltation to shell-shocked despair, delivered in an incredible variety of accents, including hardscrabble Texas, upper-class British twit, feathery Virginia gentry, and terse Maine professor, along with Alabaman, Prussian, Tennessean, Pennsylvanian, Western frontier, and lilting Irish brogue. After Hearn sent his sister the final product, she told him that, no matter what else he'd ever done or would ever do, this—*this*—was what he'd been put on earth to accomplish.

The newly flourishing institution of books on tape, for all its reliance on the latest in digital, high-tech engineering and distribution, has something primordial about it—a return to first relations (a teller, his listener, the tale)—and, in fact, something specifically Homeric (unable to see the teller, we listeners unconsciously project our own blindness onto him). This has been true to some extent of all such efforts, but never more



"Lolita"

"Invisible Man"

"A Clockwork Orange"

so than with Hearn's rendition of Shaara's "Killer Angels," a book that from the outset cast itself as a kind of originary American Iliad.

Shaara, a New Jersey-born, Florida-transplanted academic, who spent almost a decade researching and fashioning his version of the battle, had the misfortune to complete his labors in 1974, at a moment when the Vietnam-weary reading public had little stomach left for battle fiction of any sort. He barely managed to find a publisher for the book (it was finally issued by the minuscule David McKay Company), but it nevertheless claimed a Pulitzer Prize the following year. And, though Shaara died in the meantime, his book went on to find an audience—the documentary-film maker Ken Burns says that it changed his life; the director Ronald Maxwell used it as the basis for Ted Turner's recent film "Gettysburg"—and it has sold more than a million copies.

HEARN, who fled the pre-civil-rights Memphis of his youth, hadn't been a Civil War buff particularly when, in 1979, Maxwell introduced him to Shaara's novel while they were shooting a teleplay in Ireland. As Hearn recalls, "I was immediately bowled over by the book's specificity, its language, its cadences, the vividness of its characters, its deep, deep wisdom. There were four, five, six passages that were among the most shattering things I had ever read. So when the guys from this little audio-book outfit first got in touch with me out there in California, I snapped at the opportunity."

Hearn would read for three hours at a time. "That was about all I could handle," he says. "Sometimes, when I was sitting there alone in the darkened glass booth, the pages spread on the spotlit easel before me, the concentration grew so intense as to become almost vertiginous." On being asked if his experience reading the Shaara had any impact on his developing characterization of Max, Hearn replies, "Absolutely. It was all about *stillness*—this incredible welter of passions and turmoil that can be welling up inside a person while for all the world he remains perfectly still. I'd read somewhere how Anthony Hopkins, when he was preparing for his role as the manservant in 'Remains of the Day,' met an old English gentleman who told him approvingly how he'd once had a butler who 'when he entered a room the room became *more empty*.' I held that comment to my heart as I was creating Max. But that doesn't mean the butler's *head* was empty. I'm convinced that Max was a voracious reader.

"So there was that," Hearn continues, "but then there was also just this business of *the pure, unalloyed primacy of words*. I guess I'm essentially a verbal person. I have no vanity about what I look like—this may be why I never really fit into California's essentially visual culture during my four years there. For me, my face is simply a place to slot my mouth, my voice. Which reminds me of an old story about one of the veteran Broadway warhorses—maybe it was Hart, or somebody like that. Anyway, one day this producer was describing to him the staging for this incredibly elaborate scene in some upcoming musical, how part of a house rolls in stage left and another part stage right and a whole other house rises up from under the floorboards and another one floats down from the rafters, and there's all this other glitzy razzle-dazzle going on, and in the middle of it all stands the protagonist, and—'Yeah,' Hart interrupted the guy impatiently. 'Yeah, so, but what does he *say*?' "

OF ECO AND E-MAIL

IT had been foretold that at this year's American Booksellers Association convention, in Chicago, the sober printed page would be humiliatingly outdazzled by a battery of communications gizmos, such as interactive software and CD-ROMs. Well, there was a certain amount of such stuff around, and some of it was indeed impressive. Rather more typical of the general level, though, was a computer video game at the booth of Atlantis Interactive, an outfit from California, which showed a buxom blond woman being menaced by a man with a bandaged head. "We have an adult selection and a non-adult selection," a man at the booth told a browser.

"You mean a children's selection?" the browser asked.

"No. Non-adult," the man said impatiently.

"Ah," said the browser, comprehension dawning.

That said, the technological frontier was the theme of so many convention conversations that it was a relief, later, to hear it dismissed by that acute Italian analyst of language and information Umberto Eco. "I don't even have an E-mail address. I have reached an age where my main purpose is *not* to receive messages," Eco said at a party in his honor at the University Club of Chicago. An academic approached to say he wanted to send Eco a pamphlet. "Send it to me at the University of Bologna. It will reach me in a few days," Eco said briskly, if implausibly. He looked around the room. "I have a dinner, so I have decided to get completely drunk—it's my way of dieting," he said. Somehow, it seemed we were still in the world of books, not cyberspace. ♦

This week's contributors: Alison Rose, James Wolcott, Jay Fielden, George Plimpton, Lawrence Weschler, Anthony Haden-Guest.

"*Kim*" "*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*" "*The Hobbit*"

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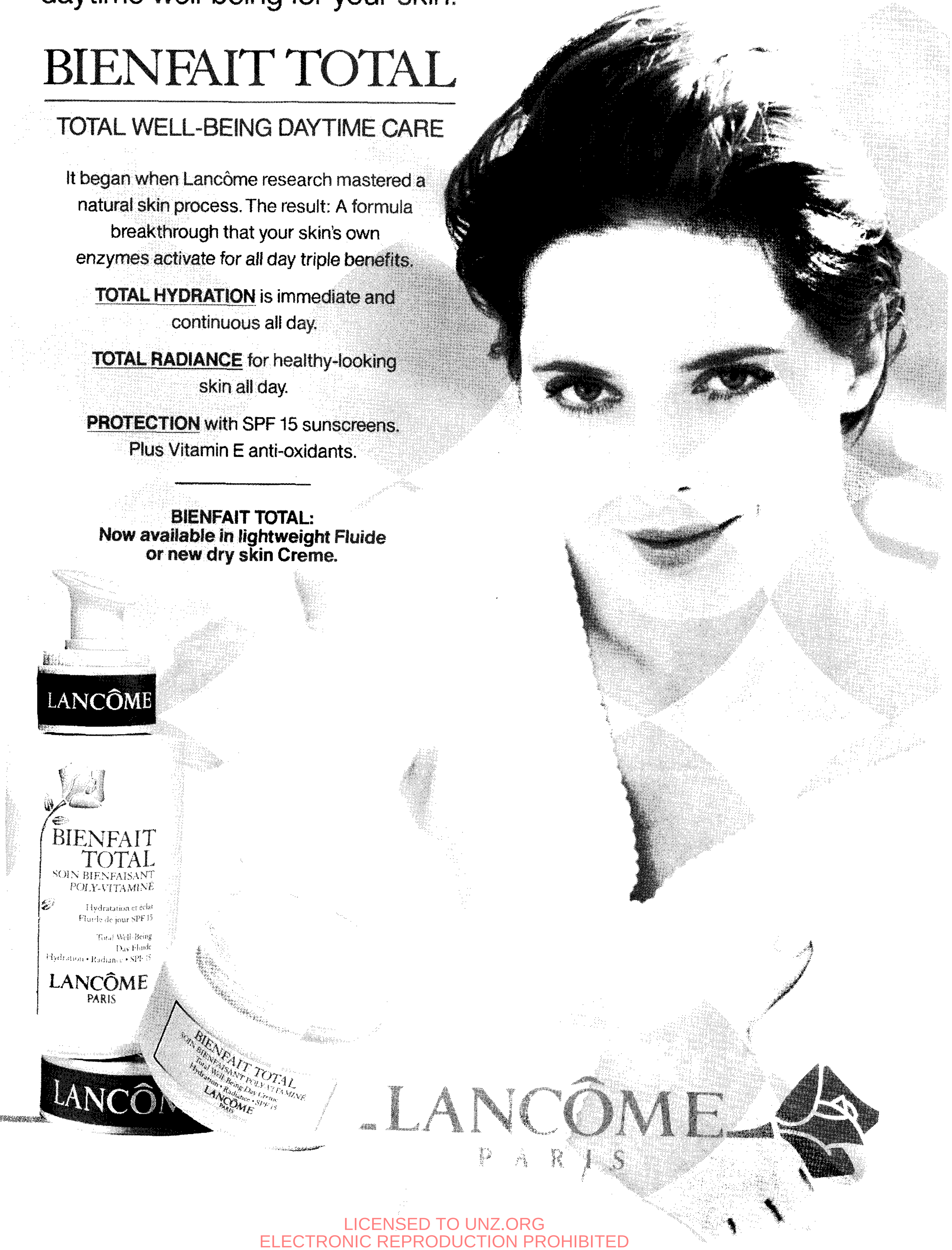
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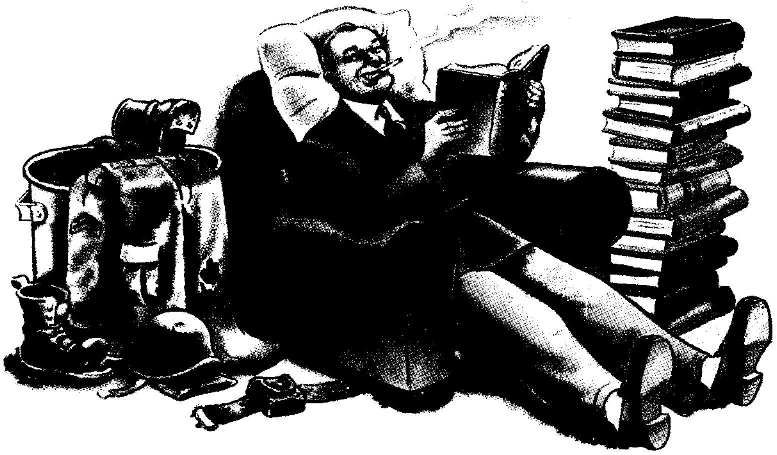
ANNALS OF POPULARITY

WARRING FICTIONS

Last year, the author read the current best-sellers; this year he turns back fifty years to see if the Good War produced good books.

BY ANTHONY LANE


ROSS MACDONALD

IT is the summer of 1945. You are a young G.I., though not as young as you were. You landed at Omaha Beach, perhaps, or came ashore at Anzio, and you have grown old pretty fast. The war has died in Europe, but it still has a few weeks to live in the East. You took a bullet in the final month, and now you find yourself lying in a hospital with a hole in your right thigh and time on your hands. You used to read everything: classics, trash, the latest thing. What would the latest look like now, after six years of the world on fire? Something covered with scorch marks, for sure: something real hard. So it's a big deal when a package comes from your sister in New York. It took weeks to arrive. "I enclose a novel you might enjoy," she writes. "Everybody here is just crazy about it." Here it is, the latest thing, right here in your hands. And just look at that title: "A Lion Is in the Streets." You can smell the cordite already. You open it at random: "Somewhere the evening damp was pulling perfume from out the jasmine and spreading it like a tangible thing."

Huh?

THE *Times* best-seller list for July 1, 1945, is strong stuff. It could take on any current list and knock it cold. Running your eye down the twenty most popular novels of the day, you won't find many bantamweights; we're talking big hitters here—names like Steinbeck, Sinclair, Irving Stone, and A. J. Cronin. Men who don't consider a novel to be a novel unless you can use it to brain a horse. What ever happened to the wartime paper shortage? On the home front, if you looked up and saw the Germans coming across the Hudson you could hold up your copy of Lloyd C. Douglas's "The Robe," eleventh on the list, and be sure of fending off small-arms fire. As for Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead," seven hundred and fifty-four pages of pure beef, it could stop a tank. From what I gather, Ayn Rand could stop a tank.

It's a far cry from today's best-seller list. Today's list is for wimps. We like reedy novellas, quick-solve murder stories, distillations of wisdom. At the moment, there are even a couple of good books—Anne Tyler, Jane Smiley. What the hell are they doing there? Good was not an issue for the readers of 1945. Good was bad news. What people needed was *long*. John Grisham and Robert Ludlum might have passed muster, but no one else. What people didn't need was a sense of humor. In the top ten books I

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found not a single joke; wartime fiction lived under a frivolity curfew, a gag blackout. There was also an easygoing acceptance of euphemism. Whenever sex reared its head, it had to keep its hat on. The strict erogenous-zoning laws of the time meant that physical response had to occur at least two limbs away from the intended center of operations, as in this sentence from "A Lion Is in the Streets": "His finger moved faster, faster, back and forth in a small flipping motion on her ear lobe." But another, larger form of euphemism prevailed in these books. Only four of them took war for their subject, but most of them took it upon themselves to offer the kind of spiritual encouragement that war demands. This was laudable, but the poor authors kept tripping over their feet as they lunged at the telling detail. During a chase sequence set in sixteenth-century Spain, say, we suddenly find the word "jackboots." Aha! The Nazi Inquisition!

With news of the war filling your head every day, I guess it was tricky not to let your pen slip into topicality. Edmund Wilson saw it happening all around, and expounded his dejection to readers of this magazine in the March 3, 1945, issue. Reviewing a book by Glenway Wescott, he wrote, "In general, it has been disappointing to find so many writers of serious talent turning away from the study of behavior to reassure themselves and their readers with some immediate political program or some resuscitated religious system. . . . The result of this tendency is simply to land the writer in melodrama." In the case of unserious talent, of course, the loss was less grievous; most of the best-selling authors were up to their necks in melodrama to begin with. But the advent of war seems to have loaded them with a sense of responsibility, which is the last thing that melodrama needs. Hadn't these writers seen "Sullivan's Travels"? Didn't they realize that people require *more* fun, not less, when times are tough? Many of the books on the list are stirring and righteous, but only a couple actually bother to entertain.

ONE of them is at No. 10: "Forever Amber," by Kathleen Winsor. People still know the title—a real hummer, giving off the permanent, enviable resonance of the truly meaningless—but they don't have a clue about the book. Only the very *best* best-sellers enjoy this special, two-tone gift: the ability both to entrance a generation and to be almost completely overlooked by the succeeding ones. A librarian of today, coming across "Forever Amber" in the fiction section, might assume that it was all about traffic lights and reshelve it under Urban Planning, next to "Gridlock: The Facts."

It is, in fact, all about Restoration England. How do we know this? Because our heroine, Amber St. Clare, was born in 1644; because she grows up to become the mistress of Charles II; because people keep saying things like "Odsfish!" and "flopdoodles" to her; and because at one point we find her "sitting in a chair reading Dryden's new play." Apart from that, however, we could be witnessing any era in English history—or, indeed, any middle-period episode of "Falcon Crest." Among Amber's favorite boys of the bedchamber are Rex Morgan, Luke Channell, and—her all-time top toff—Bruce Carlton. The novel swaggers along in the confidence of its own high spirits; it is the purest known form of Romantic Fiction, which means it was read with a flashlight under the bedclothes by millions of teen-age girls, who then spent the rest of their lives wondering why nothing under the bedclothes ever came close to Bruce Carlton.

The higher Amber scrabbles up the social mountain, the more lustrous the inhabitants she finds. By the time she reaches royalty, both she and her creator are pretty well falling to their knees, which, not to be indelicate about it, is just where the King likes them. Winston Churchill was said to be the last person in the Western world who believed in the divine right of kings, but I think he would have met his match in the very British author of "Forever Amber." It could be because her own name misses sovereign status by a whisker, but, whenever Charles rolls up, Miss Winsor falls into one of her fits, raving over "his swarthy good-looks, the powerful grace of his body, the deep smooth gentle tones of his voice." Mind you, here is a writer whose dialogue includes those well-known seventeenth-century phrases "Thanks a million" and "Hey, just a minute!," so authenticity may not have been her driving motive. I was touched by the closing pages, in which Amber takes ship for Virginia: "In another hour she would be gone from England—gone from Whitehall and its plots and schemes forever." The real schemer here is Kathleen Winsor, of course, who winks knowingly at her American readers. Courtly old England was a scream, but for real liberty—if you're trying to win a world war, for instance—you need the New World.

AND so to No. 9. I have a problem with No. 9. I cannot read it. God knows, I have tried. I have downed three straight whiskeys and then tried to read it. I have leapt clean and sober from a cold shower, grabbed the book, and, standing upright, started to read it out loud. But the same thing always happened: I buckled like a puppet and fell into a subterranean sleep. No matter where I looked, I kept hitting characters saying things like this: "I don't see why our Liberal politicians should make such an effort to avoid reminding the people of Quebec that they *are* a part of an organization which, whatever its faults, is still the only concrete example of the kind of international federation which we want to see existing all over the world." Hear that language sing, my people! Can't you just *taste* it—the raw tongue of Canada, lashing the art of fiction into a fresh new lather?

This tale of the north is called "Earth and High Heaven." It was written, if "written" is the word, by Gwethalyn Graham. I admit, in retrospect, that I should have seen trouble coming. There's a P. G. Wodehouse story in which Bertie Wooster falls for a girl named Gwladys. His Aunt Dahlia is appalled. "No good can come of association with anything labelled Gwladys or Ysobel or Ethyl or Mabelle or Kathryn," she says. "But particularly Gwladys." I would second that, adding only that a novelist called Gwethalyn somehow constitutes the worst menace of all.

The place is Montreal. The date is June, 1942. The woman is Erica Drake, who comes from wealthy Protestant stock. The man is Marc Reiser—Jewish, reflective, and, as if to compensate for all the cads around him, equipped with what seems to me a ridiculous quantity of compassion. ("Marc had got up to feed the undernourished pigeon.") The first time Erica sees him, she knows that he is the one. You can tell this from the sudden, mad

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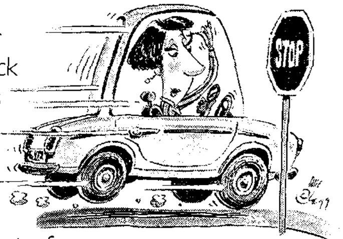
d. shave or apply makeup only while keeping a safe distance between yourself and the car in front of you.

e. have called before you left to indicate you'll be a few minutes late.



2. The new employee in accounting is in the office kitchenette getting familiar with the place. Since you know your way around you take this opportunity to:

a. fill her in on the latest office gossip.

b. give her a list of all the people who have had her job in the past six months.

c. ask her to join your bowling league.

d. tell her how well the microwave makes popcorn.

e. familiarize her with the coffee maker and other appliances.

3. You are out to dinner with two other couples. You should:

a. order the most expensive entrees and lobby hard for splitting the check equally.

b. force the group to sit in the smoking section or threaten to leave.

c. keep a cigarette lit in the ashtray during the hors d'oeuvres because they get eaten quickly.

d. threaten the waiter that you'll reduce his tip if he fouls up.

e. make a group decision about a smoking/non-smoking section before making a reservation.

4. You and your kids are at the grocery store which is, as always, crowded. You should:

a. enlist your kids' help by having them squeeze all the fruits with their dirty fingers.

b. let the bigger child push the smaller child in a circle around the salad bar.

c. send the kids to the bulk section unattended to sample snacks.

d. wear comfortable shoes so that in the checkout line, you can run to get something you forgot.

e. have all coupons, checkbook and/or money ready for the check out clerk.

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5. It is a nice, quiet Saturday morning. The doorbell rings, and a kid from down the street is selling candy bars for softball uniforms. You should:

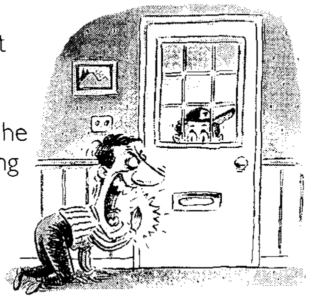
a. make a positive ID, call the cops, and refuse to open your door.

b. yell through the door at him to get a job and leave you alone.

c. open the door, tell him he has a lot of nerve bothering you on a Saturday, then slam it.

d. make deep barking noises behind the door.

e. if you can, buy at least one bar and tell him good luck.



6. It's a nice day, so you and a friend decide to roller skate at the park which has attracted a lot of people. You should:

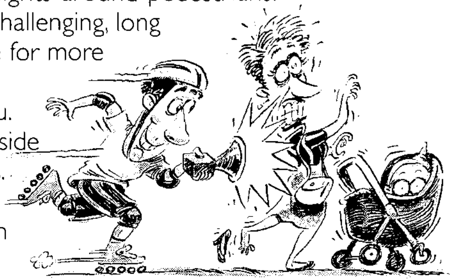
a. skate figure-eights around pedestrians.

b. figure out a challenging, long course, and race for more money than you brought with you.

c. skate side-by-side on the sidewalks.

d. bring a portable air horn to alert parents pushing strollers of your approach.

e. find another less populated place.



7. Your wife's brother, a smoker, is visiting for a few days. You like him, but not his habit. As the head of the household, you should:

a. confiscate his lighter and cigarettes at the door.

b. buy gas masks for your family.

c. pitch a tent for him on a level place in the back yard.

d. let him smoke wherever he wants this time, but hold a grudge.

e. politely tell him where you would like him to smoke while visiting.

8. A seat in the company vanpool has just opened up, and you've been added to the pool. On your first morning to ride with the group, you should:

a. ask politely if the rider next to you will hold your mirror while you shave or put on eyeliner.

b. ask your driver to slow down when you pour coffee.

c. eat an onion bagel for breakfast so your stomach doesn't growl during the ride.

d. open your newspaper to its full width and hold it high so others can read with you.

e. be on time.

THE DAILY SCOOP

IVE THE 90'S?

you might be wondering why we are doing this. We believe that common sense is a better solution to many of the issues of our time than more Government intervention in our lives. This book provides solutions to some of life's dilemmas. It suggests that a little old-fashioned common sense can work wonders.

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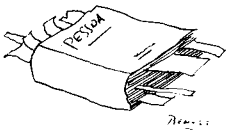
TOGETHER, WE CAN WORK IT OUT

zing in the prose: "Another thing that was interesting about him was the structure of his face." How can she resist it?

She can't. Unfortunately, her parents can. Charles Drake, her father, is revealed in all the polite, poisonous anti-Semitism of his age and class. The young lovers struggle against this prejudice for the better part of three hundred pages before finally breaking free; needless to say, they carry the author's best wishes with them at all times. You cannot fault the ethics of this book. It was published in 1944; the camps had not yet been liberated, but American readers were under no illusions about the attempt to obliterate the Jewish people in Europe, and any reminder of the tribulations undergone by Jews in the free world served a useful and chastening purpose. But the best intentions have a nasty habit of breeding the worst art, and "Earth and High Heaven" is so inept that it actually ends up corrupting its own sincerity. Some may find its clumsiness rather calming; however dire the conflicts that rage around the world, crummy books never change. While everyone else was doing their best to win a war, Gwethalyn was blithely doing her worst, by writing prose. I suspect she had some awful inkling that, what with all her social duties to the reader, she was neglecting her obligations as a novelist. Hence those delightful moments when the polemic stops and a tiny, hopeless scrap of stage business starts up, does its stuff, and dies. Here is Marc in full flow: "Even when people don't dislike you, even when they really like you, you still make them feel slightly self-conscious, I don't know why. Maybe it's just because they've been brought up to regard Jews as 'different.' Do you want a biscuit?"



On to No. 8: "Dragon Harvest," by Upton Sinclair. This is the only one of the top ten books that tries to be up to the minute. The action gets going in the South of France in 1939, and runs out of steam just as Paris is falling to the Germans. And, wherever the action is, there is Lanny Budd. Lanny is all things to all men. To some he is a playboy and an art dealer, son of the beautiful Beauty Budd; to others he is a sympathetic ear, listening gently as his good friends Hitler and Chamberlain explain why they must or must not go to war; to a select few he is a secret agent, dispatched by America to bring her the truth. His good friend F.D.R. is fervently pro-Lanny: "A man who knows Europe as you do, and yet keeps the democratic point of view, is truly useful to me," he says. If anything, the President is a little jealous: " 'Lanny,' he remarked, 'you must get a great kick out of your job, associating exclusively with the world's headliners. How on earth do you manage it?' "

I'll tell you how he manages it, Mr. President. He manages it by being a complete jerk. Right from the second page, when I learned that Lanny "permitted himself no vices," I knew I was going to loathe this man. O.K., he saves the world and all, but anything less than universal justice is beneath him; you wouldn't trust him to feed your cat over the weekend. Also, does he *have* to schmooze Adolf and the rest of the boys with quite such gusto? Lanny's pretense of enthusiasm is so thorough that even the author seems to be taken in. Here is Upton Sinclair, standard-bearer of anti-Fascism, on the charms of *der Führer:* "To be near him was like living in the midst of a tornado, like being in a Vulcan forge where new universes were being wrought."

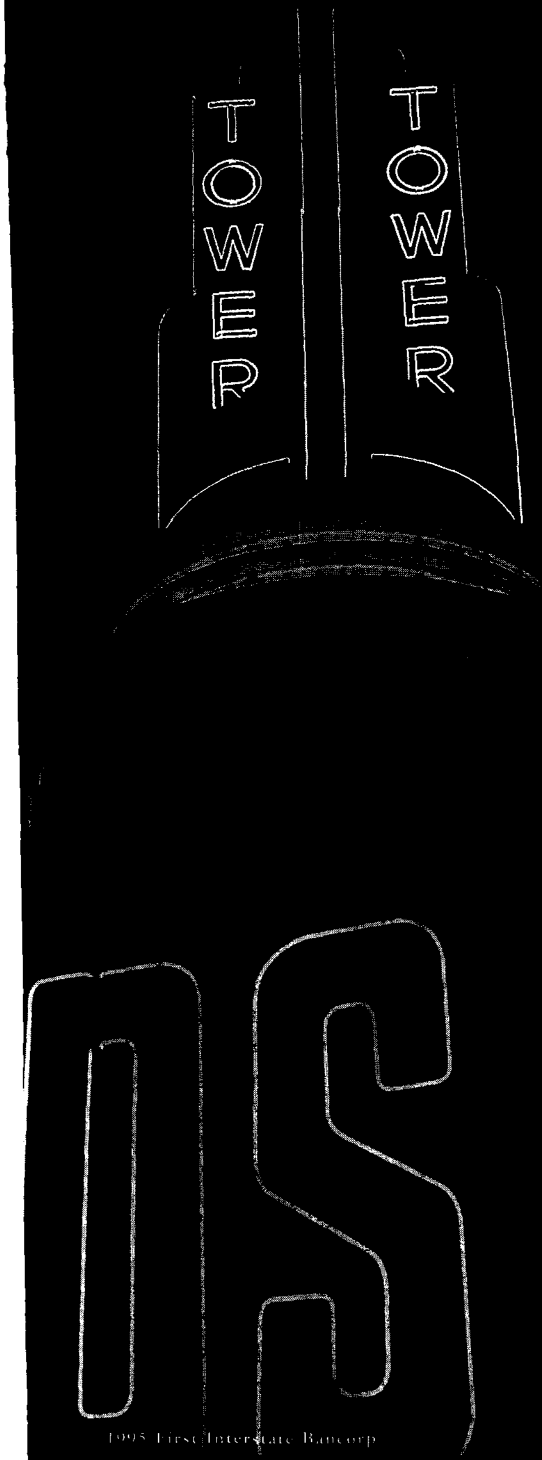
It's the old Miltonic story: when your hero is a wimp, the villain steals the scene. This is bad luck for Sinclair, because the only justification for "Dragon Harvest" is to dramatize Allied propaganda. The book is barely held together over seven hundred pages by a framework of spindly clichés. The myth of the gentleman spy, for instance, died peacefully after Buchan and Somerset Maugham, and with it went the dream that the world was anyone's oyster. If you were forced to live under Fascism, the world was your rotting fish head, and you picked off what sustenance you could find. And if you were fighting Fascism you weren't going to draw much comfort from a creep named Budd as he swanned through high society and claimed that it was work.

At No. 7 we find "The Fountainhead," by Ayn Rand. Many people will remember this story, for in 1949 it was made into a movie, starring Gary Cooper. It was a very strange movie indeed, but it was nothing compared to the book. The book is nuts.

As the plot begins, we encounter our hero, Howard Roark, who wants to be an architect. To be precise, he wants to be a universal life-force who happens to specialize in architecture. Just look at his student drawings: "The buildings were not Classical, they were not Gothic, they were not Renaissance. They were only Howard Roark." Odsfish! True to his leonine name, Roark considers himself king of his profession even before he has joined it, and fate bears him out. His gas station is like no other gas station, and his Temple of the Human Spirit is, in the words of one opponent, "an insolent 'No' flung in the face of history." Roark waits for commissions from the few who understand him, while all around him the rest of mankind—the compromisers, the journalists, the second-rate—hustles and lies its way into mediocrity.

I have a terrible feeling that Ayn Rand believed everything she wrote. When her prose swoons over hunky Howard, over "the strange, untouchable healthiness of his body," I see her crouched feverishly at her desk, dabbing her temples at the thought of her gorgeous creation. She even gives herself a mouthpiece: Dominique Francon, the ice-cold daughter of a rival architect. Dominique is raped by Roark and loves him forever. ("That was the degradation she had wanted and she hated him for it.") If it weren't such nonsense, this masochistic kitsch would be offensive, but it *is* nonsense—the Higher Nonsense, a sort of visceral naïveté that can be maintained only through an utter lack of shame. It is distantly related to D. H. Lawrence—Roark rolls around on the good earth like Birkin in "Women in Love"—and, further back, to the high-springing, athletic declamations of Whitman. Now, of course, it sounds richly ridiculous, and I am amazed that readers were prepared to tolerate it in 1945; maybe the Good War marked the last time in which irony could not prevail—in which a common effort of society, bracing itself against a readily identified evil, gave people an unembarrassed taste for abstractions, for talk of integrity and terror. When Rand writes of one character that "the oval of his chest and stomach sallied forth, flying the colors of his inner soul," what she means is "He

HOW I GOT HERE–THE LINER NOTES:



Drumsticks on
furniture, age 2.

Bought first record,
age 9.

Sold first record,
age 9½.

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Still do.

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was fat." But that would never do.

Reading "The Fountainhead" after "Dragon Harvest" put a fresh slant on Rand's achievement. What may have come across in wartime as single-minded striving now reads like a crash course in the Will to Power, and Roark, for all his steely modernist intentions, reminded me less of Mies van der Rohe than of Albert Speer—or, indeed, of the volcanic Führer who erupts into the imagination of Upton Sinclair. The more Rand insists that her hero is not like other men, that he barely notices them, the less suitable he appears as a role model for Roosevelt's America. It is only the fact of his "preposterous orange hair" that disqualifies him from becoming the perfect Aryan. "The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing," he announces at the end, having dynamited one of his own constructions. If the book were any better, he might have been genuinely disturbing; as it is, he dwindles into something of a lonely dickhead. Poor old Howard: an *Übermensch* adrift in an *Unterbuch*.

Howard Roark may be a pain in the buttress, but his loony ambitions force you to keep reading, whereas Janie Driscoll Cauder merely gets on your nerves. She is the heroine of the sixth book on the list, Taylor Caldwell's "The Wide House," and she's as mad as hell: a bony Scottish widow, newly arrived on the shores of America in 1850. She has four loathsome children and a cousin named Stuart Coleman, who, like most of the men in this novel, greets any tense situation with a manly, Errol Flynn laugh. ("He bent double, almost collapsing in his mirth.") Janie and Stuart have got a standard-issue love-hate thing going. It never really boils over, thanks to the smothering effect of the surrounding prose: "They wallowed in their emotionalism." Hippo talk. Like Kathleen Winsor, Caldwell is never happier than when wallowing around in adjectival ooze. The town of Grandeville, New York, is described in one passage as raw, overgrown, boisterous, vital, and bustling, and in another as raw, uncouth, bustling, and riotous. Fair enough, except that the two descriptions are only twelve lines apart.

The only point of interest in "The Wide House" lies in the anti-German sentiments that Caldwell tries to sneak into the action. We have to sit through endless accounts of the Schnitzel family—hardworking German immigrants who have made good. There is Herr Schnitzel ("slaughter-house owner . . . rumbling and snarling . . . enormously bloated . . . cruel and suspicious"). And there is Frau Schnitzel ("sulky swinishness . . . bristling manner . . . brutish and merciless . . . arrogant and insensible"). All that comes from two short paragraphs. And it makes you wonder about those fifth-generation Germans, long since transformed into good American citizens, who had to read this stuff in 1945. Maybe they never saw a copy. Maybe they were too busy fighting the Germans.

AND so to No. 5, "The Ballad and the Source," by Rosamond Lehmann. During the eighties, her work was officially recruited into the feminist canon; so what endeared her to the American public of the nineteen-forties? Having finished the book, I am none the wiser. "The Ballad and the Source," Lehmann's fourth novel, is English to a fault. The prose veers between jolly, down-to-earth larks and languid, up-in-the-clouds metaphysics, sometimes within the space of a single sentence: "A megalomaniac certitude coursed through me like draughts of ginger beer." That is the voice of the narrator, Rebecca Landon, who is ten years old at the time of the story and plainly needs to go the ladies' room as soon as possible. At the start, she and her sister are introduced to Mrs. Jardine, a sweet old dear who slowly metamorphoses into a gorgon: someone who has blighted the lives of others and has suffered her own share of betrayal, and is basically a health hazard to any impressionable child. Yet the counsel that she offers is a hundred per cent affirmative: "The source, Rebecca! The fount of life—the source, the quick spring that rises in illimitable depths of darkness and flows through every living thing from generation to generation. It is what we feel mounting in us when we say: 'I know! I love! I *am!*' Do you understand me now?"

Well, as a matter of fact, no, but I know a man who *would* understand. Mrs. Jardine? Meet Howard Roark.

That speech about the source can itself be traced back, I think, to the great exhortation—"Live all you can"—

delivered by Lambert Strether at the climax of "The Ambassadors." Rosamond Lehmann is steeped in Henry James. "The Ballad and the Source" is haunted by "The Turn of the Screw" and, more naggingly, by "What Maisie Knew." The unspoiled Rebecca is all ears, but what pours into them is corroding her innocence like acid. There are brilliant moments here, fraught with the solemnity of the fanciful child: "I went downstairs with my heartache, and it was so horrible and so enormous, that it was like carrying a bag of stones tied on to the bones of my chest." None of the other writers in the Top Ten can claim Lehmann's learning or equal her intelligence. So why does this book leave one with an impression of profound silliness?

It is, in a way, a question of bad luck: the profundity itself has turned silly. Lehmann couldn't have guessed that the manner in which she buttonholes the reader, like that in which Mrs. Jardine lectures Rebecca, would fade irretrievably into a mannerism. You try to immerse yourself in the moral quandaries stirred up within the book, which are genuine and dense, but the perfume rising off the prose sends you reeling back: "Mademoiselle flutingly announced that it was time for us to make our adieux." Translation: "Time to say goodbye."

AND hello to No. 4—"Immortal Wife," by Irving Stone. Stone is the man who made a career of dramatizing the lives of the famous. "Lust for Life"—Vincent van Gogh (1934). "The Agony and the Ecstasy"—Michelangelo (1961). "Immortal Wife"—er, Jessie Benton Fremont. I can't help thinking that the readers of 1945 were getting the fuzzy end of the lollipop. Jessie's main achievement is to stand by her husband, John Charles Fremont, as he marches from one arduous adventure to the next: the young lieutenant in the Topographical Corps becomes the most intrepid traveller of his generation, is court-martialled in 1847, goes to California, wins a seat in the Senate, loses a Presidential election, wins the love of his troops in the Civil War, loses his fortune, and so on. In between heroics, they just about find time for the old standby, aural sex: Jessie "took his finger and touched it lightly to the tiny circle of white lobe which

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A RIVER TOWN is the irresistible new novel by the author of *Schindler's List*. Based on the real-life events of Keneally's grandfather who left Ireland to seek the wide open spaces of Australia, it is a charming story of unexpected heroism—funny, touching, vintage Keneally.

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she left exposed." Fremont enjoyed an absurdly full nineteenth-century existence—it must have felt like a three-volume novel even as he was living it—and Stone doesn't need to do much apart from marshalling the facts, which is pretty much what Jessie herself does, preparing the records of her husband's journeys for publication. She had many gifts, but what she was really good at was subediting.

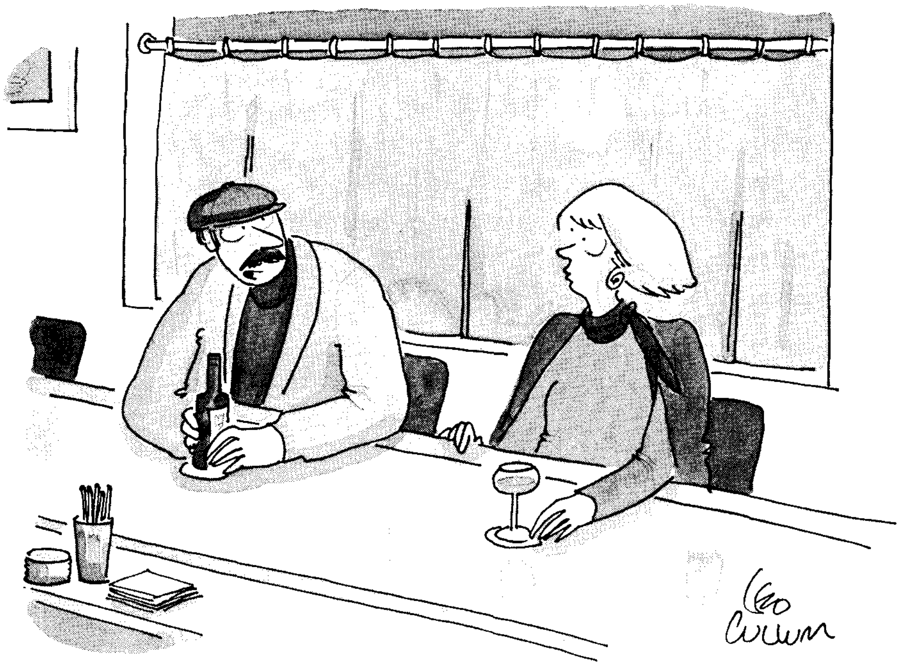
In all honesty, Irving Stone could have used some help from his heroine. He's an old hand at what you might call the logistics of his trade, but these should not be confused with the activity known as writing. Right at the beginning, when Jessie first encounters John, there's a dark note of premonition: "She sensed that words were not the sole measure of communication, nor perhaps even the best." Stone should know. "Immortal Wife" seems even more sluggish now than it did in 1945; with the recent rise in the creative status of biography, the biographical novel has slumped out of fashion. It strikes us as a waste of good research for Stone to have dug up so many truths about the Fremonts and then crammed their mouths with such blatant invention. John, for example, has a shattering family secret, but I'm not sure that he unveils it with quite the right élan: "*I live in terror . . . of the day when someone . . . will call me a . . . bastard!*" Jessie consoles him, then marries him, whereupon he scoots off to the Wild West and doesn't come back for six months. Bastard.

RIGHT, then—No. 3. No messing around now. "Commodore Hornblower," by C. S. Forester. Sound fellow, Forester. Haven't read him since my school days, when we were lined up and told to read "The Gun." All about, as far as I recall, a gun. Gripping read. This one equally gripping. Year: 1812. Plot: Commodore Sir Horatio Hornblower now has command of his own ship during war against France. Sails to Baltic: damn chilly up there, Russkies in the offing. Meets Clausewitz, teaches the egghead a thing or two. Showers naked in front of crew. Crew not sure where to look. Hornblower notices bald spot on head and, even more frightening, new level of wisdom in soul. No fog in the prose, though: clear view from start to finish. Plenty of technical lingo to make the reader feel briny and wide awake: "Twice the paul slipped over the ratchet as they hauled in on the spring and swung the ketch round." That sort of thing. Plain, solid English, not like the foreign muck: "He peered at the ragged sheets and found himself, as usual, thinking what a barbaric language German was." Just like the buggers that speak it, eh? Good, straightforward propaganda, Bonaparte barely disguised as Hitler: "No continental nation yet had successfully opposed Bonaparte, although every single one had felt the violence of his attack; only England still withstood him." And who will lead England? Hornblower. Toward the end, finds himself alone on unfamiliar vessel: same rocking motion as ship, different smell. Legs instead of keel. Horse, that's it. Rides into action. Good team effort from England, Russkies lend a hand, Hornblower gives captain's performance. Saves civilization. Again. That's the stuff to give the troops. End of story.

So grab a rope and swing over to No. 2, Samuel Shellabarger's "Captain from Castile"—a boring title for an overstretched melee of swordfights and colonial conquests, set in an age when every knight bore himself erect and every wench tucked a purse of dirty money into her garter. I ate it up. Six hundred and thirty-three pages of this sunburned trash? Pah! A mere scrap, *por Dios*. Had it been a thousand pages long—nay, ten thousand—I would have finished it off and asked for more.

Our hero is Pedro de Vargas, who has everything going for him: a cool cavalier dad; a sister called Mercedes; a crush on the luscious Luisa, who appears to have been ordered direct from the Courtly Love catalogue ("The arch of her eyebrows, the bow of her lips, her pearl-white complexion, were perfect"); and a no-strings nobility clause in his character ("He spoke and loved as a hidalgo should"). Then his world starts to crumble: his family is pulled in by the Inquisition, and Pedro has to flee the country. Cut to Mexico, where he hangs out with Cortés and has a small problem with the Aztecs: "Doom! Doom! Doom! Doom! pulsed the great drum of the War God."

All of which has nothing to do with literature—for once you can actually forget about the prose—and everything to do with movies. By the end of the Second World War, Hollywood had essentially commandeered the art of narrative. Most of the books on the *Times* list trespass on typical movie territory—warring families, new frontiers, bust-thrusting corsets. But none of the books can match the grace and economy with which a studio picture could waltz through a daft story and almost keep a straight face. The wrist-cracking saga novel tends to plow on for



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◆ *BACCHUS.*

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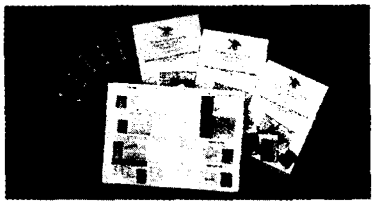
◆ *Program ID.*

We sponsored this booklet to help retailers enforce drinking age laws. It provides prototypes of drivers' licenses from all 50 states to help verify the authenticity of ID's when presented.



◆ *Barbara Babb Lecture Series.*

Some young people may believe that the consequences of underage or excessive drinking will occur to somebody else, never to them. Barbara Babb, R.N. and former critical care flight nurse, dispels that myth in her provocative presentation entitled "Make The Right Call." She has made a lasting impression on over a quarter of a million high school students across the country. Her program gets underage kids to think hard about what they could be doing to themselves and their loved ones if they drink.

Programs like these are working. Underage drinking is on the decline. According to a study by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, drinking among high school seniors has dropped 29% since 1978, and is now at its lowest level since the study began in 1975. Since 1982, the number of drivers killed in teenage drunk driving accidents has decreased by 60% as reported by the U.S. Department of Transportation. It's progress, but there's a lot more work to do.

At Anheuser-Busch, we feel that education and awareness are the best tools to fight underage drinking. We will continue to support these programs and develop new ones to help make underage drinking a thing of the past.

Anheuser-Busch, Inc.

We invite you to share your thoughts on the issues mentioned here. We would also be happy to send you information regarding our policies and programs designed to encourage responsible drinking. Write: Anheuser-Busch, Inc., Consumer Awareness and Education, One Busch Place, St. Louis, MO 63118.

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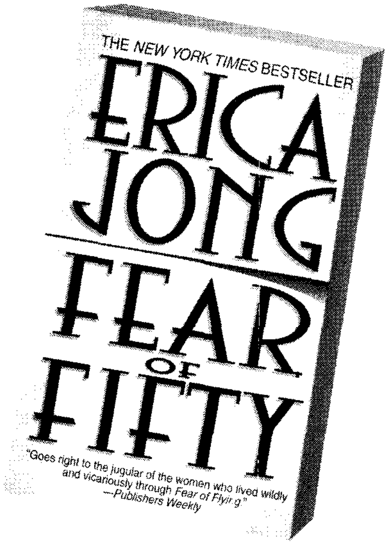
Somehow flying doesn't seem so scary anymore.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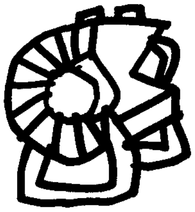
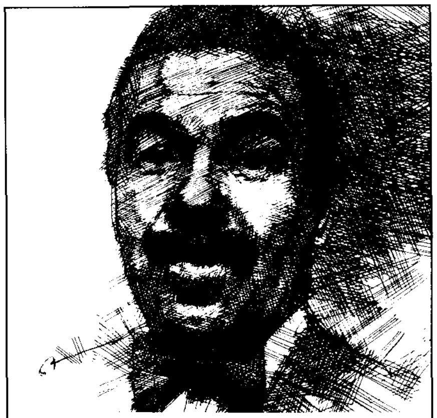
seven hundred pages not because it needs the space in which to bloom and flourish but because sheer bulk is the nearest it can get to that infuriating ease with which even the dumbest movies seem to create and decorate a world. Most of the top ten books of 1945 are bulging with envy, but they're not envious of Tolstoy, they're envious of "Gone with the Wind"—and not of Margaret Mitchell, either, but of David O. Selznick. And the only book that has the guts to confess this is "Captain from Castile." It openly mimics the manners of a plush film, being far too brazen for authenticity but not so reckless that it shrieks with caricature. I was unsurprised to learn that it quickly became a Tyrone Power picture. All of the villains here cry out to be played by George Sanders. One of them murmurs, mystified by Pedro's latest escape, "You can't conceal a sword in your breeches." Now *there's* a good title.



And so to the No. 1 best-seller of July 1, 1945, "A Lion Is in the Streets," by someone named Adria Locke Langley. Dear me: "In Nature's own way, her inner being began its years of lying quiescent, encased—not sending out into the various spokes of her life that indefinable quality which makes for significant and meaningful living." Oh, *that* quality.

The spokeswoman in question is named Verity. I would love to report that she is a lying bitch, but, sadly, she spends almost five hundred pages living up to her name. She is married to Hank Martin, who goes from being coarse, horny white trash to being the coarse, horny governor of the Magnolia State. The plot is a backwoods version of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"—the little guy made big—but the rubbery emotions bouncing around here are unique to Ms. Langley; she makes Frank Capra look like Mad Max. The book is a hymn to the power of justice, pummelling your ear and your conscience with such humorless zeal that poor old justice falls by the wayside, leaving power to stride on alone. The one diverting aspect of Hank's political strategy is that you can't quite tell whether he's leading with his beliefs or with his pants. Right from the first pages, when he's still a poor peddler, hiking from door to door with "Sizzle, his special cooking fat," you know that this guy is *hot.* The newly ravished Verity recalls the sound of her mattress under pressure: "the many small cracklings of a while ago, cracklings that had grown rhythmical as if they were tapping a million drums—little, secret, earthy drums." Doom! Doom! Hank embarks on married life by running down his carnal menu: "Me, I like my kissin' with laughin' after lovin', 'r I like it with teasin' afore lovin', 'r I like it in earnest with lovin'." I reckon Hank Martin missed his vocation. Why go into government when you could be writing lyrics for Dolly Parton?

This sweaty allure, naturally, takes him deep into Gary Hart land. His maid, Selah, explains, "De womens jes' plumb git dat lolly-gag look." I have to say I was less perturbed by the candidate's libido than by his racial attitudes. "Aw, niggers has a stuck-uppityness a' their own," says Hank, but as soon as one of them stops being uppity and starts calling him Mister Hank our hero is won over: "Y'know, Verity, I like the sound of that. We're gonna hafta git us a nigger." You could argue that this is an accurate dramatization of a rusty world view were it not for the backup that Langley offers in her casual asides: "A wide toothy grin shone from the black face," and "Moses rolled his eyes." It is vastly depressing to find these minstrel cartoons being hawked around in the guise of civilized fiction. But there's a twist in the tale: even as Adria Locke Langley was infecting America with her garbled transcription of black speech ("I was gwine ast y'all wuz usn nevah gwine correck dis chile lak Mistuh Hank"), an antidote was being offered by another writer. There, at No. 2 on the nonfiction list for the same week, is Richard Wright's "Black Boy." Langley *wants* her blacks to sound unintelligible, to be other; Wright asks only that they be the same as anyone else, and he furthers his case with the clean, perfectly lucid dignity of his dialogue. Language becomes—it has to become—as clear-cut as the rights that it is fighting to assert. By this standard, Langley is shirking her duty. "Hank took pride in never wasting time on non-essentials such as becoming the perfect grammarian,"



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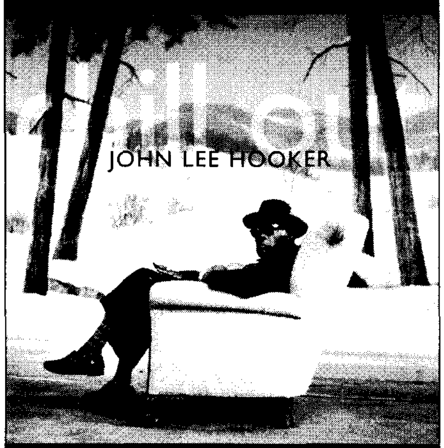
she writes. Try telling that to Richard Wright.

TIME has done its work. "Black Boy" has become a classic, whereas the copy of "A Lion Is in the Streets" that I found in a New York library hadn't been taken out since 1948. Most of the Top Ten have gone under the sea; C. S. Forester still rules the waves, and rightly so, but the world is not a sadder place without the work of Gwethalyn Graham. So what else has survived from 1945? Well, that summer Robert Lowell published his magnificently coiled poem "The Quaker Graveyard at Nantucket"; meanwhile, over in France, Samuel Beckett, who had worked both for the French Resistance and for the Irish Red Cross, was finishing his second novel, "Watt." Both men were operating, as George Orwell would say, inside the whale: they knew that the literature that endures pays no obvious heed to the conditions under which it was produced (although it would be foolish to claim that under different conditions it would have turned out the same). The great novels *about* the Second World War were years, if not decades, away: "The Naked and the Dead" would be published in 1948, "Gravity's Rainbow" in 1973. Evelyn Waugh's "Sword of Honour" trilogy was not completed until 1961. His contribution to the war effort had been "Brideshead Revisited," a far lesser work, but one cunningly attuned to the time. He admitted later that it had been written "with a kind of gluttony . . . which now with a full stomach I find distasteful." It had, however, served its purpose—to cheer up the dismal British readers of 1944, short on food and fun. Did American readers, less heavily rationed, not crave the same luxuries? Did they really have an appetite for "The Wide House" and "Immortal Wife"? Was it their *duty* to buy them—a sort of mental combat training? I have read these books, and, believe me, I would have had a nicer time chewing through a log.

BACK to our G.I. I suppose he was shipped home, finally, with his leg still bandaged. He rested up, and read the other novels on the list; his sister bought them all, just for a treat. The lucky stiff. He put down "A Lion Is in the Streets," had a smoke, and decided to stay in the Army. Books could go to hell. ♦

chill out
JOHN LEE HOOKER



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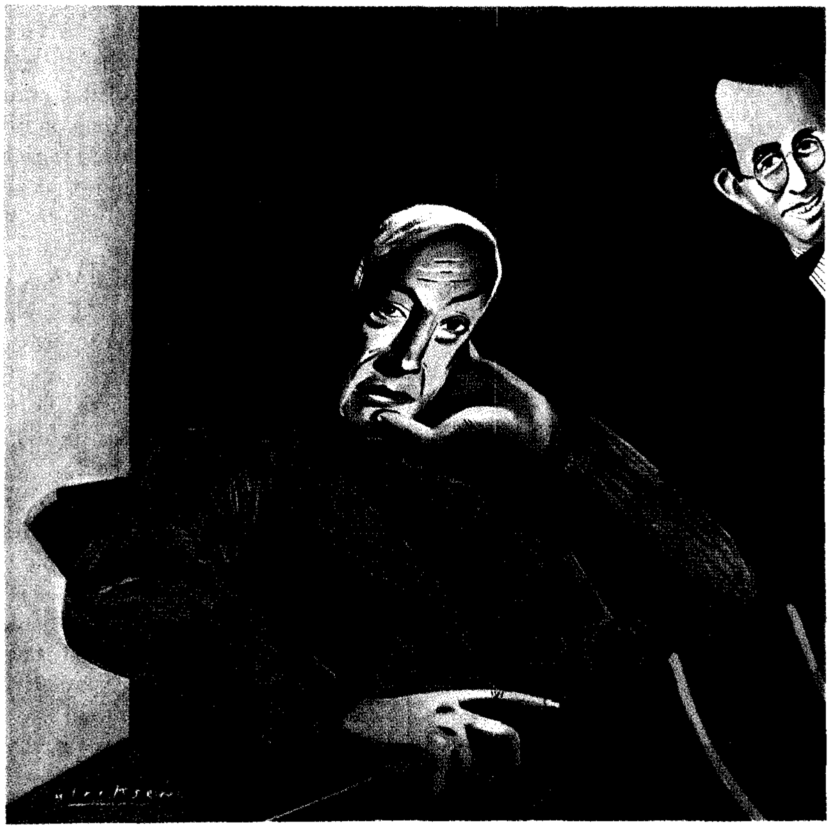
JOURNALS

THE SHADOW IN THE GARDEN

The author tracks down his subject, Saul Bellow, and gets an idea of what writing a biography is really about.

BY JAMES ATLAS



"B takes me in with that keen, appraising look of his, the wide saucerlike eyes suspicious: Who is this guy?"

MARK ULRIKSEN

AUGUST 8, 1987, VERMONT. I call Saul Bellow to follow up on my letter asking if I could write his biography.

"Mr. Bellow, I wonder if you've given any thought to my letter."

"Oh yes," he says. "I've been meaning to write you, but you know, it's the summer . . . I've been turning it over in my mind, and I'm very flattered that you should think me a worthy subject."

But he goes on to say that, while he might consider this "a future project," he intends to write a memoir of his own, and doesn't feel that he can both reminisce to me and write. He is friendly and talks warmly about my biography of Delmore Schwartz.

When I mention that perhaps I might write a book about him later on, he says wryly, "After my departure." "No!" I protest. "After you've finished your memoir." I feel that he has left open the possibility of my becoming his biographer. In a few months, I'll write again.

• JANUARY 10, 1988, NEW YORK. More news on Bellow, following my visit to Chicago to write a profile of Allan Bloom [Bellow's colleague at the Committee on Social Thought and the author of the surprise best-seller "The Closing of the American Mind"]. A few days after I return, I get a call from Bellow's son Adam. He has had dinner with his father, who is very sore at me. According to Adam, his father thinks that I'm trying to make a career out of him. I defend myself by explaining that

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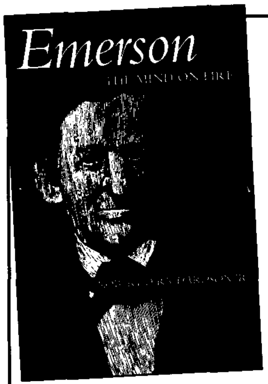

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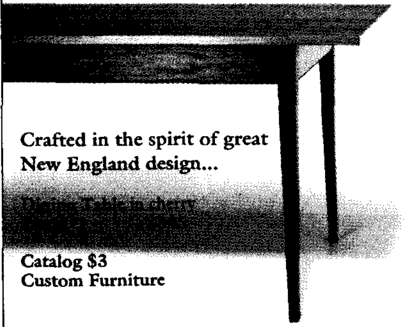

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the piece I'm writing isn't about Bellow; it's about Bloom.

A week after my profile is published, I get another call from Adam. He likes the article. He says that his father appreciated the unctuous letter I sent him stressing that my article really was about Bloom while acknowledging that I hoped to write about B later. All is forgiven; I am back in B's "good graces." So far, so good.

• August 29, 1988, New York. Lunch with Adam Bellow at Aurora. I walk in but don't see him—or do I? As soon as the maître d' motions me toward the table, I recognize the familiar profile: Bellow as a young man, the book jacket of "Dangling Man."

Our conversation is constrained at first, but after an hour or so he talks more about his father, still—clearly—the emotional center of his life. He tells me about Bellow's brothers, Sam and Maurice, who both made a lot of money, and liked to dismiss their younger brother as a "scribbler." "Just like the books," I say.

"If you want to know about my father's life," Adam comments, "read his books."

I mention several projects I'm interested in: Cyril Connolly, New York intellectuals, a memoir about growing up in Chicago—my parents are from the same world as Bellow. Adam observes, "Anyone who writes my father's biography—and someone inevitably will—has to be literary in his bones." I say nothing, but a thought occurs to me: Is he sounding me out?

• June 18, 1989, New York. I telephone Adam to say that I'm going ahead with the book. He is very cordial and tells me that his father will "not hinder" me but will never authorize it; I make it clear that I'm not looking for authorization. Adam says that for B it would be "the nail in his coffin," while admitting that his father would be "very unhappy" if he thought no one was going to write his biography.

Adam cautions me against being too idolatrous: the son warning the biographer! "Do you have a publisher?" he asks.

• February 10, 1990, Chicago. Still no response from Bellow. I've written for permission to see his archive at the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. So this morning I call, and B suggests I come over at two o'clock, after I've seen Allan Bloom. Bellow lives next door, in a concrete high-rise locally known as Steinhenge.

He greets me rather formally; he's dressed in khakis and an open sports shirt. He seems wary. He introduces me to his new wife, Janis, very young-looking, very pretty, very quiet.

We chat for a few minutes, and I talk about my visit with Bloom, but we're both ill at ease. I can't decide if we're having the first of many interviews—am I here in my official capacity as the biographer?—or if this is only a preliminary, "exploratory" session, in which I'm being sized up and my suitability as Bellow's biographer weighed. I decide to get on with it.

"May I ask you a few questions?" I say.

B looks away, gazing out the big picture window at Lake Michigan. Uh-oh.

"I'd like to discuss with you how I feel about this project," he says edgily. "I was burned by Ruth Miller." I should have known. Her book, "Saul Bellow: A Biography of the Imagination," is about to come out and I've heard that Bellow is very unhappy about it; he believed she was writing a study of his books. "I've known her for fifty years; she said she was interested in my work, and I gave her access to the papers in Regenstein. She couldn't resist the gossip. I've led a life like any other, and she made much of it. I haven't been a good caretaker of other people's letters. I'm concerned for them." He adds, "I'm not ready to be memorialized. I don't have all the answers. I'm still trying to figure things out . . ."

He'll see me from time to time, he says, but doesn't want to become too involved. I ask about access to his papers. He has no objection to my reading manuscripts, but not the correspondence: "Maybe I'll simmer down."

He mentions that Isaac Rosenfeld destroyed all the letters Bellow wrote him. [Rosenfeld, Bellow's closest friend in his early Chicago days, was a well-known critic in the forties.] I confess that Rosenfeld's son turned his father's papers over to me when I was working on an essay about Rosenfeld for *The New York Review of Books.* B still has Rosenfeld on the brain; he wrote a whole unpublished novel about him that's in the Regenstein archives. Now he wants to know what Isaac said about him in the journal he kept. I promise to send B the relevant entries. [A mistake, I realize when I get

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home and read them. They're full of malice and jealousy. What do I do now? Maybe Bellow will forget.]

It's time to go—a girl is arriving to "take letters." As I'm putting away my notebook, Bellow asks if I have a hat, and opens up a closet by the front door that's full of hats: "My dead brothers' hats are in here, too." I remind him of the time, several years earlier, when he lent me a hat. I had been interviewing him for *Vanity Fair* and it was pouring rain: "It was three sizes too big."

We stand awkwardly at the door, and Bellow briefly puts a hand on my shoulder. I suddenly remember a time when my father drove me to O'Hare on my way back to college and sat staring through the windshield as I got out of the car, not wanting me to see his tears . . .

I descend in the metal elevator of Steinhenge with a pounding heart, and sit in the car for a long time. Then I drive off and park a few blocks away, afraid that B will come out and see me writing in my notebook.

• FEBRUARY 25, 1991, CHICAGO. I call him from the Quadrangle Club to request an interview. He tells me to come the next day from one-thirty to three. He calls me Jim.

I arrive promptly. He looks well, casually dressed in his usual uniform: a white shirt open at the neck and khakis. After I ask him a number of factual questions, he says, "Why do you want to know all this?" *Because I'm your biographer*, I feel like saying. He looks stunned when I tell him I interviewed Ezra Davis, who lived in the Bellows' house on the Northwest Side of Chicago in 1926, and demands to know where I dug him up. I tell the story: how I went to Montreal to interview friends and relatives from B's early childhood, and how a writer who had done archival scholarship on B took me to a senior citizens' center, where I found Ezra Davis—in the sun parlor. B takes me in with that keen, appraising look of his, the wide saucerlike eyes suspicious: *Who is this guy?* It's beginning to dawn on him: I'm really going to exhume his past, unearth and reconstruct it in every detail. I'm going to write his biography.

"You know more about me than I know myself."

I have an alarming fantasy that he's going to rise up out of his Eames chair and order me from his door, like the father in Kafka's story "The Judgment," who orders his son to jump off a bridge. But instead he goes over to his antique desk and rummages around for the famous passport that belonged to his mother, Liza, the one so vividly described in "Herzog." It's yellowed, with an ornate seal from the Governor of St. Petersburg, just as in the novel. Abraham, his father, travelled under a separate name: "I'm sure they were the best papers he could buy."

I get up promptly at three to leave, since that was our agreement; but it's clear I could have stayed longer. I ask B about the rumors that he's moving to Boston. "It's too far to go from here to Vermont," he says. "But a move at my time of life, even though I'm in fairly good shape . . ." He doesn't know what to do. But it feels wrong to advise him.

• MAY 10, 1991, CHICAGO. I call. "What does your day look like?" he asks.

"It's pretty clear. I've saved it for you—along with a lot of other days."

He laughs. "Point taken."

We chat for a while in his living room—about New York and the difficulties of living there. He asks me where I live—one of the few times he's ever asked me anything about myself—and notes that Philip Roth is my neighbor.

We drive off in Bellow's dark-blue Range Rover, Janis in back, and head toward the Northwest Side on I-94. Bellow's a good but cautious driver, proud that he knows his way around town. It's strangely exhilarating to be driving around Chicago, my own home town, with Bellow. I wouldn't have had the nerve to suggest it; this field trip was his idea. When I wrote asking for permission to obtain his school transcripts, he replied, "Suppose that instead of rummaging in grammar-school records devoid of real interest you were to have a tour of the city—a personal conducted tour of Hyde Park, Humboldt Park, and several other locations? I wouldn't at all mind doing this, I might even enjoy it."

So here we are.

On the Northwest Side, we drive along Cortez: a tree-lined street, grassy front yards, wrought-iron fences, and wooden doors with oval glass. B lived here from the age of ten to the age of fourteen—first in a ground-floor apartment, and then down the street in a larger three-bedroom with a side yard that was the landlord's garden.

The family then moved, as its fortunes improved, to the west side of Humboldt Park, on Le Moyne. Abraham had left Imperial Baking, his first job in Chicago, and gone into business on his own, peddling wood slabs for bakers' ovens.

As we loiter on the sidewalk in front of Bellow's childhood house, he falls silent, clearly moved by the experience. I think of the apartment house where my grandparents lived when I was a child, around the corner from their drugstore on Mozart: the tiny plot of grass out front, the cracked sidewalks, the dark vestibule . . . In writing this book, I'm not just retrieving Bellow's past.

I feel a momentary twinge of resentment: why him and not me? But if it weren't for him I never would have found a way to write about this stuff. The novelist confronts his experience directly; for the biographer, it's passed through the filter of his subject. I'm beginning to see this book as a covert autobiography.

"I'm not showing you where my girlfriends lived," Bellow says suddenly. "Those are the memories I really treasure."

"You don't need to," I murmur.

• MAY 11, 1991, CHICAGO. We talk on the phone. B says that he had a good time yesterday, but it "left [him] in a mood." He was "metaphysically bushed."

"There were so many missing." He quotes the Berryman poem that ends "Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up. / Nobody is ever missing." Then he says, "There are many missing."

• OCTOBER 21, 1991, CHICAGO. I call in the morning. He seems pleased to hear from me. I ask how he is and he says, "Harassed." The phone has been busy for an hour. He seems to be at the mercy of everyone who calls up. He has to go to the dentist, and I say that I'm sorry to bring him more pain. He asks me how much time I'll need, and then adds, as he always does, "What is it you want to talk about?" "The nineteen-thirties and forties," I reply. We agree to meet at five. (I offer to drive him to the dentist, which he says is "silly." He's right. I'm the biographer, not the chauffeur.)

I show up at five. B opens the door, wearing a red bow tie and a tweed jacket. He offers me tea, but seems relieved

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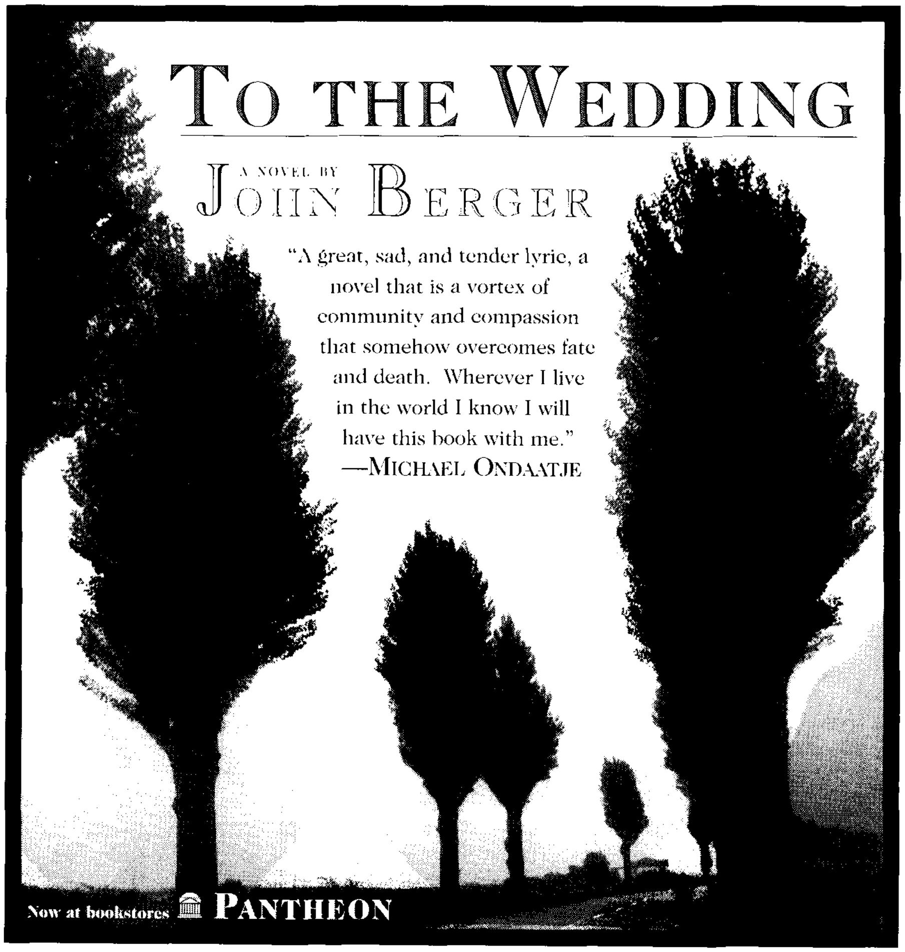

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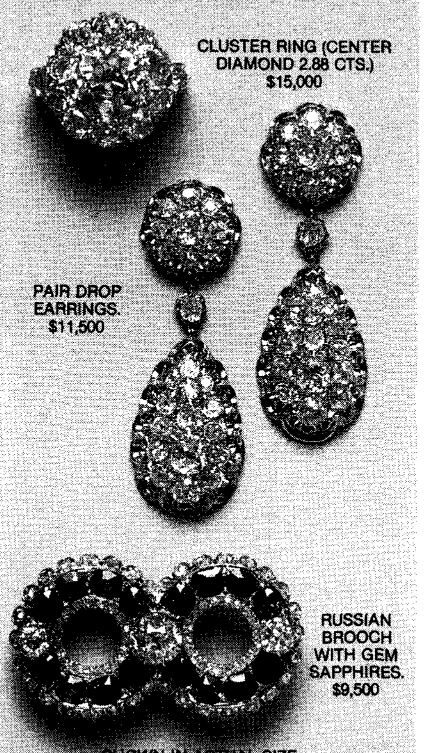
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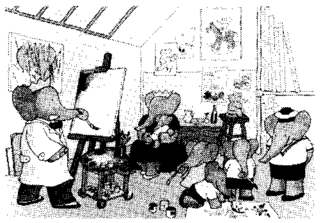

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when I refuse it: "I've been running around, and want to sit down."

I say, "First the dentist, then the biographer—what a day." He laughs.

I notice a paperback edition of "The Brothers Karamazov" open on the table. "How does it hold up?"

"Very well. It's even older than I am."

"Do you reread it every year?"

"No, it's not like Yom Kippur."

We get down to work. B met his first wife, Anita, during the summer of 1935, on the streetcar coming from the El on Fifty-first Street (like Daisy in "Herzog"): "We walked up to the university together. . . . She was extraordinarily beautiful, with fair hair and green eyes." They were in what was called the "unit" of the Young People's Socialist League, and hung around Party headquarters, a dingy auditorium on Wells, writing skits with speeches by F.D.R.

Bellow's mother had taken out a life-insurance policy and B got the money after she died: five hundred dollars. His father wanted it and they argued, but B kept it and went off to Mexico with Anita on a Greyhound bus in 1940. An edition of D. H. Lawrence's letters was the book that made them go. While he was there, he met up with Herbert Passin, a friend from the Humboldt Park neighborhood, and they arranged to interview Trotsky at his fortified home in Coyoacán. Instead they saw his corpse at the hospital, laid out with a bandage around his head.

He tells me about his mother's death—of cancer, when he was seventeen—but when I change the subject he says abruptly, "I'm trying to tell you something. . . . I didn't realize I was grieving."

It's practically dark in the room. B is clearly deep in his memories. I ask him, now that I've been working on this project for three years, whether I can see the letters. "I don't want my last tatters exposed . . . my poor porous fig leaf," he replies.

He sits, silent, in the gathering dusk, then says, with feeling, "I don't give a damn. It's really for Janis's sake. It hurts her to read about all this. She doesn't think I should do it."

More silence. "What is it you want to see?"

I explain that I'd like to see as much as I can, in order to write a thorough account. "You're in a tough spot," I say. "I have no wish to violate your privacy, and I'm not going to press you. We can think about it later." I point out that he has now known me for some time, that I have no more proof to offer, and that I want to write a book that's accurate and true. "I need to know everything."

"Everything?" he says doubtfully.

As I prepare to leave, he comments, "I've really enjoyed this today. I don't always, but these were things I hadn't thought about for a long time. You'll probably learn as much from me as from the letters. I don't mind at all talking to you. I don't want to get too involved, but from time to time . . ."

We're standing by the door, and he says, "At least I'm still here." He remains at the door while I wait for the elevator and tells me that he's going to Italy and Israel. I say that I hope I'll see him in the spring, and he replies, "I'll be back in January," as if inviting me to return sooner. I leave feeling that a deep connection has been established.

I realize two things: that I can now tell when a story I've encountered in his work is authentic and when it's fiction; and that I have to allow him to tell the stories he wants to tell, even if I've heard them before. They have a special significance for him.

• AUGUST 30, 1992, VERMONT. Janis is away for a week, and he's invited me to dinner.

I arrive, having called to say I'll be late, at the general store in his village. B is at the meat counter, wearing a blue cap, an old many-pocketed jacket, khakis, black shoes; his face is now lined with age; I notice that he's a little hard of hearing. He seems glad enough to see me and we get in his Range Rover to drive to his house. The way there is stunning—ponds with pink lilies, old white farmhouses—and he points out the landmarks, so that I'll know the route.

In the car, we talk. He says he's been working hard, but when I ask him how many hours a day he says, "I woke up at six, because I was worried about Theresa [the cleaning woman], and had breakfast at eight. Then I started a fire. It was too damp to work in the study, so I stayed in the house." The phone rang a lot, he says. B mentions that literature is no longer central—a familiar refrain, that the novel is not important . . . Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think to myself.

We sit in the kitchen and gossip awhile. I mention James Wolcott's praise of "The Bellarosa Connection" in a recent *Vanity Fair* column. He hasn't read it. He's never heard of *GQ*. He really doesn't keep up: "My eyes are on eternity."

The books in his house: Ioan P. Couliano, "Eros and Magic in the Renaissance." Southey's "Life" of Nelson. Thucydides (open on a reading stand), the Hobbes translation. "The Golem: Legends of the Ghetto of Prague."

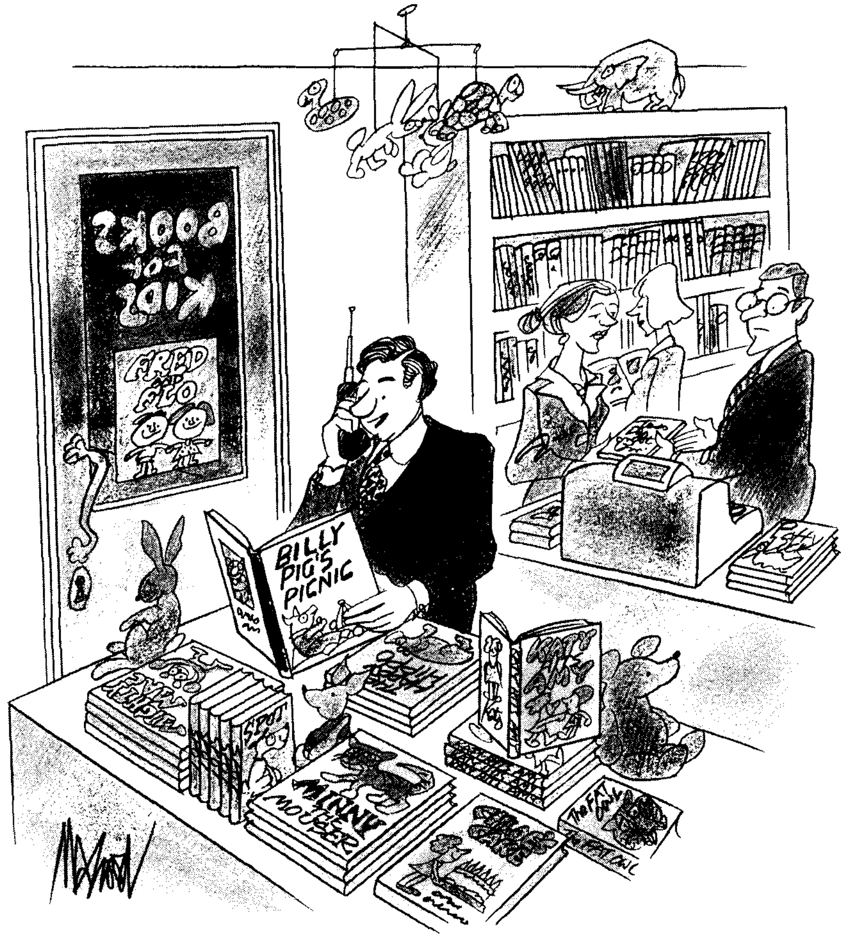
We head up Route 100 toward his favorite local restaurant, Le Petit Chef. I suggest that we pick up my car in the village, but he wants us to go together, in one car, "so we can talk." I still can't get over it. He actually enjoys this!

In the restaurant, I ask my questions. After I note that his life is "interesting," he says, "All you have to do to have an interesting life is be a damn fool." I babble something about how it's a wonderful project for me. B, deadpan: "I'm glad I haven't lived in vain."

When he asks me if I know French, so that he can use a quotation, I casually work in a mention of Nadine [his French girlfriend when he was in Paris on a Guggenheim after the war]. I say that I've seen her, and he lights up and wants to know what she's like now. I also mention Betty, a woman he met on a ship on his way to Spain in 1947; he's shocked—he hasn't heard from her in more than forty years. He says that he saw her after his marriage was over; I demur—"That can't be." What am I, Saul Bellow's keeper, that I have to catch him out in his adulteries?

However, emboldened by his apparent willingness to discuss these matters, I ask about Anita: "What happened there?" He looks away—he gets this troubled, furtive look sometimes, when he doesn't want to talk—and says, "I don't want to get into that."

I shift the subject, insisting that I'm interested not in gossip but in the manners of the times . . . An awkward moment for me, since I *am* interested in the gossip. I see for the first time that he can't really tell me everything I need to know. I'll have to figure it out for myself. All he can



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do is straighten me out about the facts, quite a few of which I've got wrong.

His fourth wife, Alexandra, somehow comes up. He says, "She won't see you." I reply, "She might." This is a *game;* an exalted game.

I mention that I don't know what he's decided to do about letting me quote from his letters, but it's one of the great literary correspondences, probably the last one: he sounds surprised, as if he'd never thought about it, but I'm not sure I believe him. Sometimes I think he has one eye on posterity when he's writing letters; they're so vigorous and off-the-cuff. He says—and this I do believe—that he's been primarily occupied all his life with fiction, and how to write it: "What to do with this talent, how to stay alive until I've gotten it down. I still feel that."

At the end of the evening, as we're driving back, he seems lonely, and I suggest we get together with my friends Robert and Patricia Towers, who have a house nearby; he likes the idea. We sit in his car and he says in a heartfelt way that he's had a very good time; asks what to call me, Jim or James. "There's always business to conduct," I say, and hand him a letter I've drawn up, giving me permission to consult the files of Marshall Holleb, one of Bellow's lawyers in Chicago. He hands the letter back: "It's just legal stuff."

Driving back alone over the mountains to my house in Bennington, I'm shouting in the car, "It's fun! Fun!" I don't feel rejected by his refusal to let me see these papers. It *is,* after all, just legal stuff; I already know the lineaments of the story. I also realize that I don't need his permission—the creative part, the original part, is my interpretation. That's what biography is . . . It can't be accurate: it's too messy; there's too much one can't know.

My greatest fear is that we'll have a falling out someday. The person with whom I used to experience a huge paternal transference doesn't exist as powerfully for me anymore; I feel independent of him, but also sad. There is no Dad. Certainly not this difficult, prickly character.

• JULY 8, 1993, VERMONT. Bellow calls to say that he's not going to the doctor in Bennington; cancels our appointment and makes it for next week.

Five minutes later, he calls back: he's coming after all; he and Janis have errands. He needs legal paper. He wants to go to the Army-Navy store for pants with lots of pockets so he doesn't have to wear a jacket when he goes into town.

We meet in front of the Army-Navy; I've just bought a copy of "Seize the Day" for $1.04 at Now and Then Books. Bellow is wearing—guess what?—a railroad cap *identical* to mine. I think we're both embarrassed. We enter the store, and there's Janis, who notes the two caps and says, "I wish I had a camera."

At the Brasserie, I ask why they finally decided to leave Chicago [Bellow had just moved to Boston]. B answers that he couldn't walk the streets and would stay inside for days at a time. He lived "a routine organized by fear." The death of Allan Bloom [in October, 1992] also had a lot to do with it: "I wouldn't have left if he were still alive . . . So many dead; walking down the street was a procession to touch the doors of the dead."

It's not the city he knew.

• AUGUST 23, 1993, VERMONT. I go to Bellow's for the signing of permissions. I'm scheduled to arrive at two-thirty; I'm fifteen minutes late—getting to his house is complicated—although it was my understanding that I would come "around" two-thirty, "after lunch." I wasn't pulling any psychological funny stuff. But when I drive up he's loitering around with Janis, and looks at his watch. "You're always so punctual."

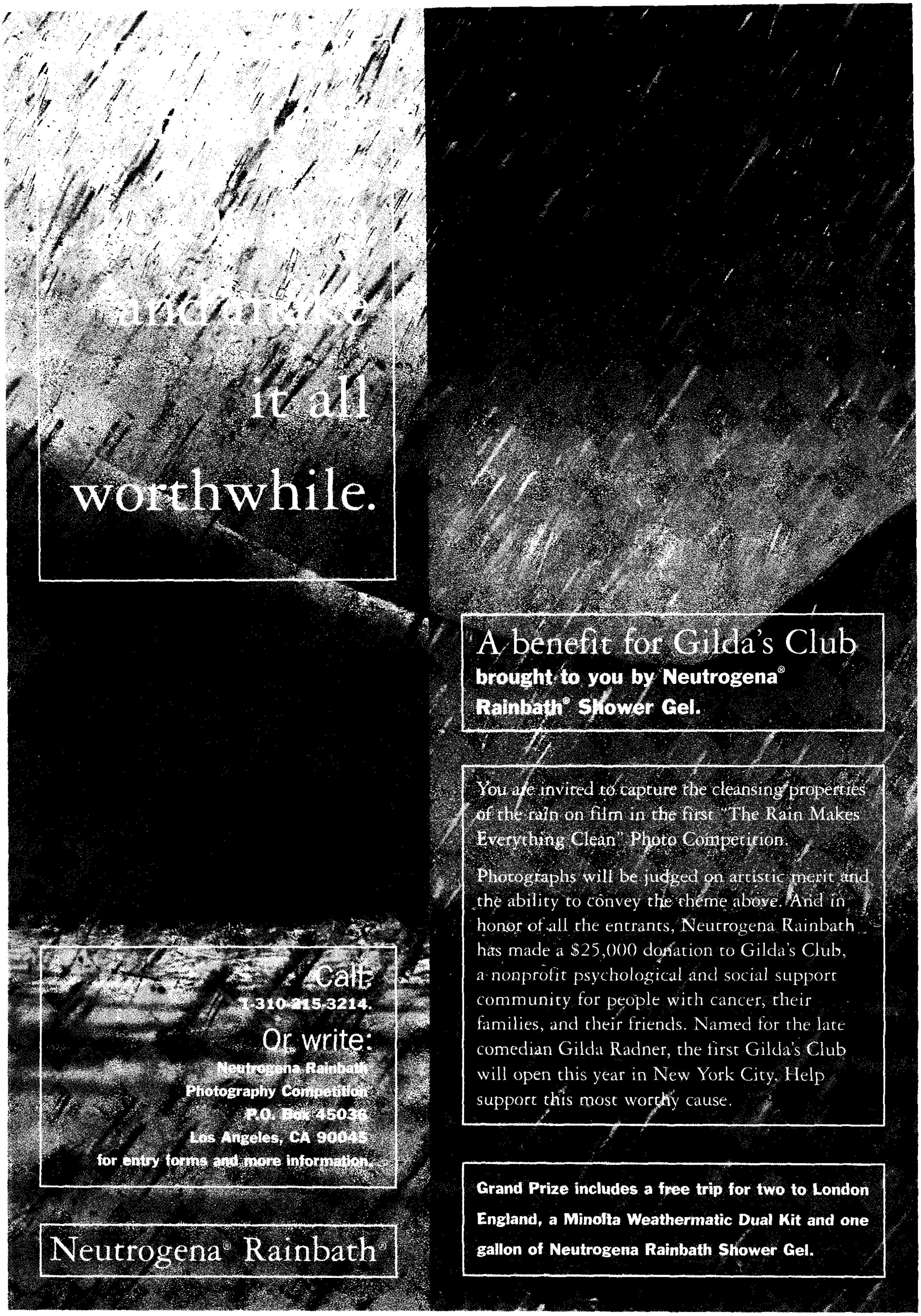
"Forgive me," I say. "It was complicated getting here."

"If the Pope can forgive, I can forgive."

Janis offers me a cold drink, and we take chairs out to sit on the lawn. We talk for a while in a desultory way, but I'm eager to get on with the business at hand—his signing off on the correspondence that I've quoted in the first four hundred pages of my book.

Bellow likes to tell stories, even stories I make it clear I've heard; when he starts in on the one about how he was fired by *Time,* he asks, "Have I told you this?" I indicate that he has. "But I haven't told you the whole thing." (Yes, you have; but what's a biographer to do? I listen.)

He also tells the story about the bear



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that came up to the door of his studio. . . . It *is* a good story.

He says that he's been reading Mary McCarthy's memoirs: that she was always on the make sexually but not his type. I say, as if from the Bellow catechism, "You found this predatory sexuality alien." Then he says that the old Jews were "horny," that there was more sex in the patriarchal society he grew up in than one might have supposed. (Now, *that's* interesting.) He went to see his cousin Sam Gameroff when he was dying of leukemia, and Sam boasted that he had "fought on many fronts"—had many women. B jokes that the sexual revolution is less like the Revolution of 1789 than like 1793—the Reign of Terror.

After two hours, he's initialled each page, except for the pages from Chapter 2, which were somehow put last. He reaches the bad poem he wrote in high school and—unbelievably—says, "I'm not going to sign this." "You're kidding." But he isn't. He's not going to sign. I say, in revenge, involuntarily, "It *is* pretty bad." Then, placating him, "But better than Sydney J. Harris's." [Bellow's old friend from Humboldt Park.] Bellow's a "contrast-gainer," I say, ingratiating myself with a reference to "Humboldt's Gift."

The afternoon ends with B reciting Sydney Harris's poem. Janis chimes in at the end; she knows it by heart, too.

Driving home, I'm overcome with that curious blankness I get after being with Bellow; so much concentration, combined with the suppression of self, is oddly exhausting. I pull into a parking lot and get out my notebook. I remember something about me Bellow once said to Gene Kennedy [a Chicago writer and a friend of Bellow's]: that I was "the shadow in the garden."

• OCTOBER 23, 1993, CHICAGO. What a complex and emotionally draining experience this book is. I arrive in Chicago late on Saturday night to stay at Zita's [one of Bellow's high-school crowd; her mother was a friend of my grandmother's]. She gives me ice cream—it's like coming home from college—and we talk about why B moved to Boston: because Chicago had become "a city of bars and gates."

She shows me her shelf of Bellow novels, all in their dust jackets, with

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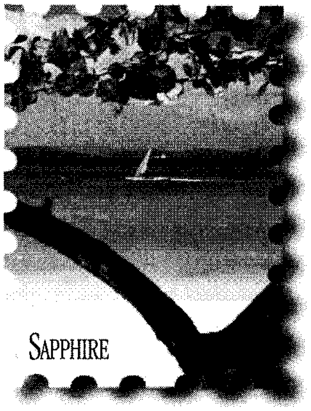

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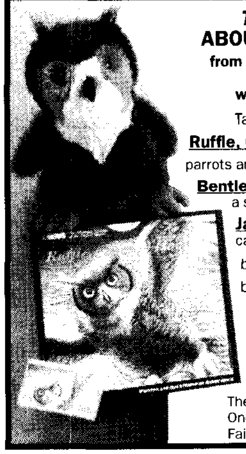

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The next morning, we discuss B's letters to Zita. Somehow it emerges that he came with Janis to look through his papers, "and took some away." Zita is happy for me to see what's left. But what's that? I'm quite angry: how could she just give them away? "Now it will be ten times as hard to get them back." She gives me a box of clippings, quite a good haul, actually, and I sit on the floor going through them. She saved every scrap, including handwritten notes of five words, but the *only* letter, amazingly enough, is one in which I'm referred to disparagingly, and in which B makes clear his position about the book.

I've been doing this book for so long that I have my own memories of Chicago in these last few years. I go sit on a bench by the lake and think about Allan Bloom's death. So many periods of elation and despair. For the first time, I feel impatience; I want to get on with my story, live *my* life. But, of course, my life has become to some extent B's life.

I feel sad tonight. I won't be coming back here again. It's goodbye to an incredible period in my life, goodbye to the place I called, talking to Anna on the phone last night, "home."

• AUGUST 3, 1994, VERMONT. The Fight: I arrive ten minutes early, again getting lost.

Janis shows me around the house: the large new library, the famous old desk from Chicago, her big study and computer. They've brought their belongings from Chicago, and are dividing their time between Boston and Vermont. She's friendly and offers me iced coffee, remembering my drink of last year; then he comes in, looking crabby.

Adam's recent promotion comes up—he's just been made editorial director of the Free Press—and B immediately starts attacking the *Times* [where I've worked for the last eight years]: how they mentioned the "conservative" books Adam published, how they have to refer to everyone's ideological credentials. Then he brings up Brent Staples and the *Times Magazine's* excerpt from his memoir "Parallel Time," an account

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of growing up poor and black and winning a graduate fellowship at the University of Chicago, where he shadowed Bellow. B is appalled that Brent stalked him on Dorchester (in the hope of meeting Bellow or scaring him, it's never clear which; Brent's a big guy). Brent is "barbarous"—a word right out of "Mr. Sammler's Planet"—yet he writes editorials for the *Times*. I turn to Janis and ask, "What do you think?" "No comment," she says. I defend Brent, and describe his devotion to B's work (Brent can quote whole passages by heart). B doesn't want to hear. Why didn't Brent come see him, he says, instead of lurking in the dark?

We go to B's study, and I mention his W.P.A. papers, which I managed to retrieve from an archive at the Illinois State Historical Library—wonderful essays on Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and James T. Farrell. He isn't interested. He sharply rebukes me for putting my iced coffee on a book, then shows me again his mother's old passport: "Have you seen this?" I think he wants to tell me the story about his family's arrival in the New World again, but no: he wants to make a point. "Why did you say that my name is Bellows?"

Suddenly I remember—the article I wrote in the *Times Magazine* last winter defending biography. I had referred to his change of name from Solomon to Saul, even though I knew he was incredibly sensitive about it. Why did I do that? One of B's favorite sayings flies into my head: A fool throws a stone in a pond and ten sages knock themselves out trying to find it. But I never said his name was Bellows. As I explained in the article, it was his brothers who adopted that name.

"I made a mistake," I say. "Maybe I wanted my independence. I can't come running to you every time. Besides," I say, "I wasn't entirely wrong. There was *some* issue about your name." He's admitted it before—to Terry Gross on National Public Radio.

I have a grievance, too, and decide this is the time to bring it up: B wrote an editorial on the Op-Ed page of the *Times* in which he denied that he'd made a controversial remark about the multicultural debate—"Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I'd be glad to read them"—and said that what he had said had been misconstrued by the "interviewer." But the remark was made to me. I published it in the *Times*, in my profile of Allan Bloom.

He doesn't reply. Instead, he goes on about the fact that he's had a "brutal" year: Brent's book, an attack on him by Hilton Kramer in *Commentary*. (B is surprised there weren't many letters to the editor: "They must be killing them in the office.") He's also annoyed about a piece by David Remnick that made him out to be a curmudgeon. "He asked me how I felt about Boston, and I told him there were rats and it was dirty."

"I don't remember that," I say.

"He didn't put it in."

We have a long wrangle over the papers. He won't give me permission for this latest batch of excerpts unless I explain how the passages are being used. Finally, he relents a bit. "I'll give you all the stuff that makes me look good," he says with a laugh.

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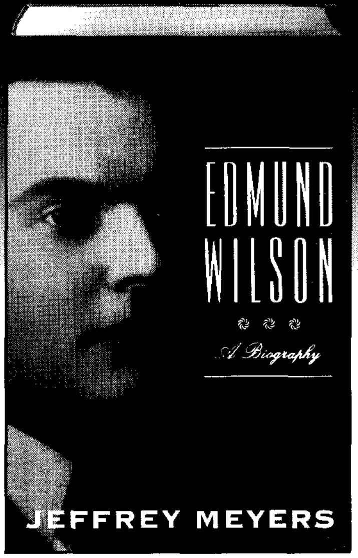

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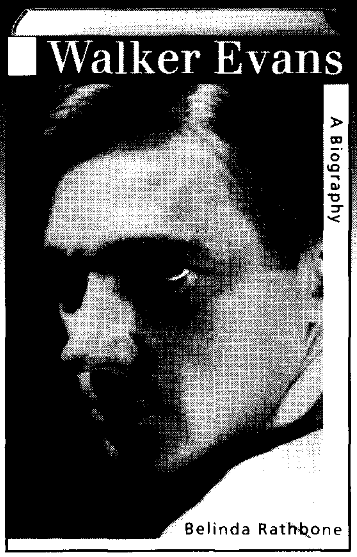

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But he's still mad. He looks at his watch, uncharacteristically; it's something he's never done before. He wants me to leave. They're going out to supper.

Janis is in the garden. I say, "We had a fight."

"Bring your swimsuit next time." She's cheerful. "It will be more fun."

• August 26, 1994, Vermont. The Reconciliation: Three weeks later, having supplied thirteen pages of "context" notes, I call up to hear his response; Janis answers, and says he's sleeping. (I still don't know how to address him. I'm James or Jim, like a handyman; he's Mr. Bellow. Speaking to Janis, I settle on "the great man.") We agree that I'll call back at five, which I do, letting the phone ring awhile. No one answers.

I go outside, and a few minutes later Anna calls me: Bellow's on the phone; he was in the garden. He wasn't, he says, "going to break my ass answering the phone." He's very conciliatory; the letters seem harmless. We agree to meet.

When I drive up, right on time, he comes out: "You're like the Illinois Central."

He tells me, giving me a direct and forthright look, that he never meant to interfere in my project; that I misunderstood; that he just wanted to know what I was quoting.

B is concerned about what certain people are saying about him. How will I know to be fair? I answer that it's my job, that I'm a writer, too; I know how to judge character. He says, "But you're not the catcher in the rye." I reply, "It's true, I can't save you every time." We both laugh.

Two hours of signing. "What can I do about all this crap?" Then, "This is tiring." He's brought the pages with him; it's businesslike. He doesn't want me to stay afterward; he gets up from the kitchen table. As I leave, he stands and waves; he seems so alone. (The phone didn't ring the whole time I was there.) I drive off, and wave. What if I never see him again? I feel drained, my mind blank as usual after seeing him. I pull over at the Beaver Pond to write these notes. Sign on a tree:

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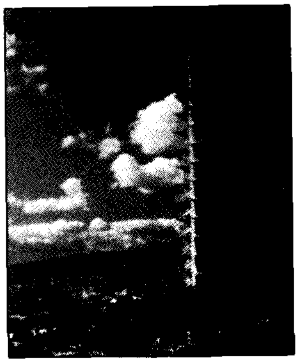

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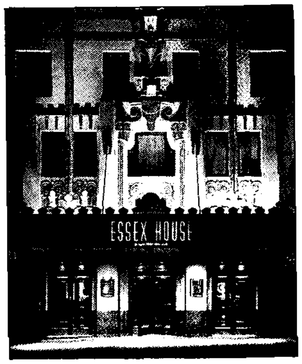

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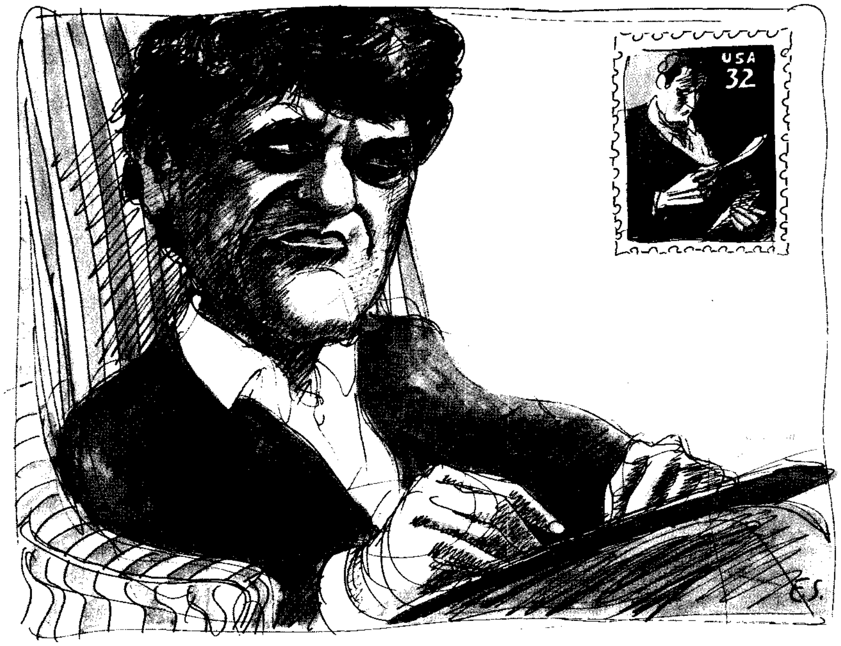
JOURNALS

NOT HALF AS BRIGHT AS HAMLET

In between dinners and clubs and parties and (sometimes) writing fiction, the author finds solace and solitude in his private notebooks.

BY LEONARD MICHAELS

SEPTEMBER 22, 1981. You're a depressed and pessimistic type, but much happier than most people, because you're so often wrong—your work wasn't rejected, your greetings were returned, you passed the test, didn't get sick, came home all right, the check was in the mail, the house didn't burn down, your kid recovered, your watch wasn't stolen, the dog wasn't rabid, the noise in the dark wasn't a murderer, the plane didn't crash, you got the job, the girl, the prize, and won the race and lost the rash, the cough, the tic, the worm, the stink, the fear.



"I think: David will find my letter annoying. Then he'll wonder if someday my kids will sell his letter through Sotheby's."

EDWARD SOREL

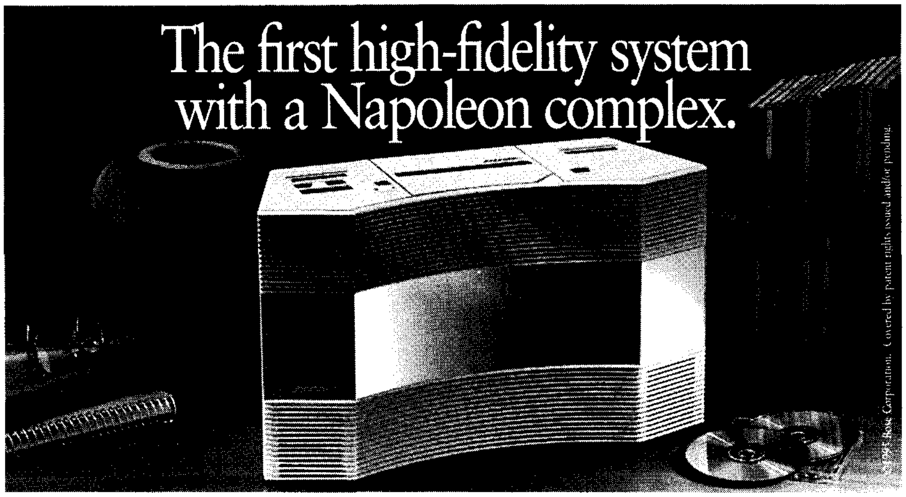
• SUNDAY AFTERNOON, MARCH 22, 1992. Walking in northside Berkeley. A sign: "Estate Sale." People going in and out of a house. Somebody died. About to pass the house when I see two friends. They're going into the house. I join them. A hospital bed is in the middle of the living room. I look away. Somebody died right here. I walk to another room. Junk mail piled on a table. An envelope is addressed to Professor Vlastos [Gregory Vlastos, a philosopher]. I'm startled. I'm in *his* house. I wasn't invited. It suddenly feels like an angry house. I start to flee, then think I'll say goodbye to my friends first. I look for them. They aren't anywhere. Notice a bookcase. A few books scattered on the shelves. Maybe the others were sold. I should leave. Should say goodbye, but I pick up a book, an Everyman's Library edition. Yellow cover. Descartes, "A Discourse on Method." I flip through pages looking for marginalia. Sure enough, comments in small scribbled script, lightly pencilled. The book now feels precious. Seventy-five cents. I buy it. My friends are outside, lingering on the sidewalk, waiting to say goodbye. I show them the book and say it belonged to the great Vlastos. I babble. Did you know this was his house? They're unimpressed. I feel awkward, futile, beside the point. Enough. Goodbye. At home I go through the pages searching for more marginalia. Two little words stop me. Where Descartes says, "I had always a most earnest desire to know how to distinguish the true from the false, in order that I might be able clearly to discriminate the right path in life," Vlastos underlined the sentence and scribbled, "Not serious!"

The hospital bed in the middle of his living room comes to mind.

• JULY 7, 1992. Went to dinner with Louisa at Teddy and Elaine's. They're renting a house in Tiburon. Two or three thousand a month, but the insurance company is paying. They lost everything in the Oakland fire. The house is for sale. Over a million bucks. I think: I'll never own a house like this. We tour the rooms. Fantastic view of the bridges and the bay. Could I live in this house? I couldn't. I'd feel there was nothing left to want. I'd rather live in a monk's cell. As we're driving home after dinner, it's very dark. Can't see trees or water. I'm hypnotized by the road, the meal, the wine, the headlights. Louisa snoozing, slumped against the door. I start talking, as if only to myself. I have forgotten she's twelve years old. She says, "Stop." I say, "Why?" She says, "I don't want to hear it." I say, "If I can't talk to you, who can I talk to?" She says, "Just stop it." I say, "Why?" She says, "Dad, I'm like a little flower, and you're watering me—by pissing on me." Then she giggles, amused by the idea of herself trying to be a kid.

• AUGUST 5, 1992. If Becky looked different—even a trivial difference—we might never have met. For example, if her hair were a bit red she might be in Buenos Aires or Budapest or New Orleans this minute, carried away by an architect or pilot or lawyer or politician or moron. She said she likes morons. "Mmmmm," she says, "a moron." Very painful, but I must get used to the idea. Nothing beats a moron.

• DECEMBER 18, 1993. Puna Coast, Kalani Honua, near Pahoa. Three gay men in the next room, and yet another one who is sick, coughing all night. I hear strong wind, sea advancing in the distance, rain slapping leaves and roof, heavy, insistent rain that blots out all but the man who is coughing. The rain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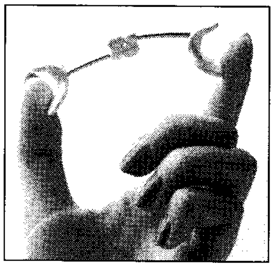

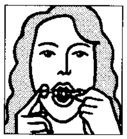

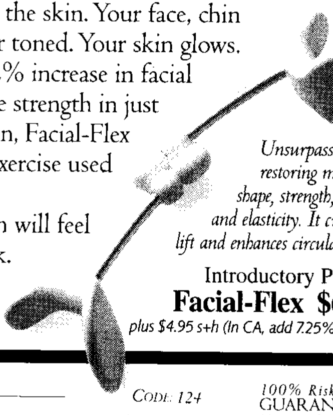

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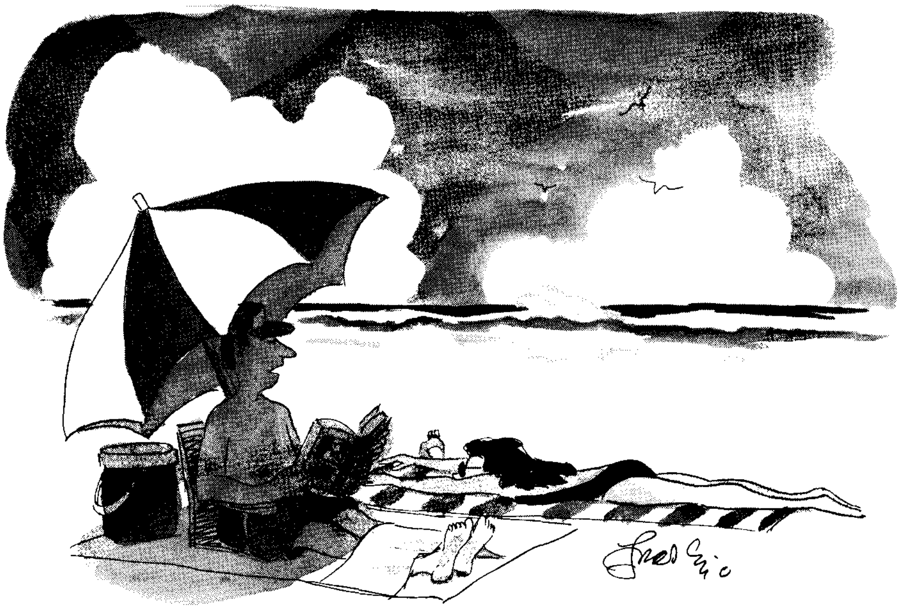

"I've read another sixty-two pages. Time to turn over."

• •

grows more intense and I imagine there must be a dreadful consummation to such force, but none comes, only loud continuous rain.

• DECEMBER 13, 1994. Dinner at Enrico's. A Madonna imitator pops up in front of our table. Loud music. Madonna does a dance routine. Hot and acrobatic. Everyone loves it. The pleasure is in letting yourself have doubts. It isn't Madonna, but is it a man or a woman? Why is inauthenticity so pleasing? I think of evangelical TV preachers. Flashy clothes. Exaggerated emotions.

An acted feeling is more effective than a real feeling, since it has the value of magic. Hamlet writes in his daybook, "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." He repeats himself—"smile, and smile." Thus he mocks his own struggle to learn. Much harder for me, not half as bright as Hamlet.

• DECEMBER 14, 1994. Marsha calls, invites me to a party. I say, "O.K." Then she says sadly, "The people won't be interesting." We start laughing at the idea. She says, "Well, we can talk to each other." Could do that without the party, but now I really want to go. What are uninteresting people?

• DECEMBER 23, 1994. Marsha's party. As promised, there are uninteresting people. Familiar types. Jog-bike-hot-tub-massage-eat-meditate-fuck-fly-around-the-world California people. Subsist on experience. Not a book anywhere in sight. Some guys in a corner are playing video games. I get a beer and join them, intending to kibbitz, but there is no conversation. They make little grunts when the video motorcycle goes off the road or smashes into something. I make grunts, too, but don't feel accepted. Can't grunt right. After about twenty minutes, I ask if I can try the game. The guy at the controls gives them to me and leaves the room. The others follow him. I pretend to be absorbed, like a jog-bike-hot-tub kind of guy, though nobody watches me.

• APRIL 3, 1995. Am asked to introduce Robert Stone when he gives his reading. I agree to do it. But that night I have a dream. I'm onstage, making the introduction. Everybody is there. Fred Crews, Ralph Rader, Tom Flanagan. All my old colleagues. They're smart and critical. They expect me to make a fool of myself, so I'm scared and know I have to be good. I begin by listing Stone's awards, and then carry on with a personal appreciation. I say Stone is in the tradition of American writers who deal with the subject of evil. Before Stone, I say, there was Flannery O'Connor. Before Flannery O'Connor, I say, there was Emily Dickinson. It seems like a wonderful insight, but suddenly Bob Hass (my friend, husband of my ex-wife, stepfather of my daughter) stands up and very firmly says, "No!" He then recites a long poem by Emily Dickinson to prove she didn't write about evil. When he finishes, I wake up. The clock on the night table says 5 A.M. I call Iowa City, where it is 7 A.M. I have to speak to my little girl. I am upset, need to know she loves me. Bob answers in a sleepy voice. Domestic. Proper. Safe. I cry out—as if it were an astounding coincidence that Bob has answered the phone, though it is his phone number—"Bob!" He says, "Yes?" I'm grateful he's there, being a good stepfather, taking care of Louisa. All this in feelings, not thoughts, simply because Bob sounds sleepy. I begin raving. "I just had a dream and you were in it." He listens patiently. I recite the one line I remember of the poem: "The stair in the middle of the house." I tell him that it means once you go up "the stair in the middle of the house," you can't come down again until dawn, because there is something dangerous below. Then I ask if Emily Dickinson wrote such a poem. He says, "She should have, but I'm afraid she didn't."

Bob then gives Louisa the phone. I tell her what happened. She laughs. Later in the day, I phone back to speak to her again. I say I know her mother thinks I'm crazy, but I'm very worried about what Bob thinks. She says, "Oh, don't worry, Dad. He's thought you're crazy for a long time." I explain that I've been taking a medication called colchicine. It has side effects, one being hallucinations. Louisa is laughing. The more I try to sound sane, the more she laughs. I go on, to keep her laughing. The sound does me good.

• APRIL 7, 1995. David Lodge sends me bound galleys of "Therapy," his new novel. It makes me happy. No jealousy, so I must truly love him. So happy that I immediately write him a letter, praising the novel. I haven't read more than three pages. I confess that I've read very little and say that the little is funny and engaging. Absolutely true. Say I'll finish it that night. Absolutely not true. I go on and on about other things, and the letter becomes long. I haven't seen David in years. I have a lot to say. I am getting a big kick out of listening to myself talk to him, making lots of jokes

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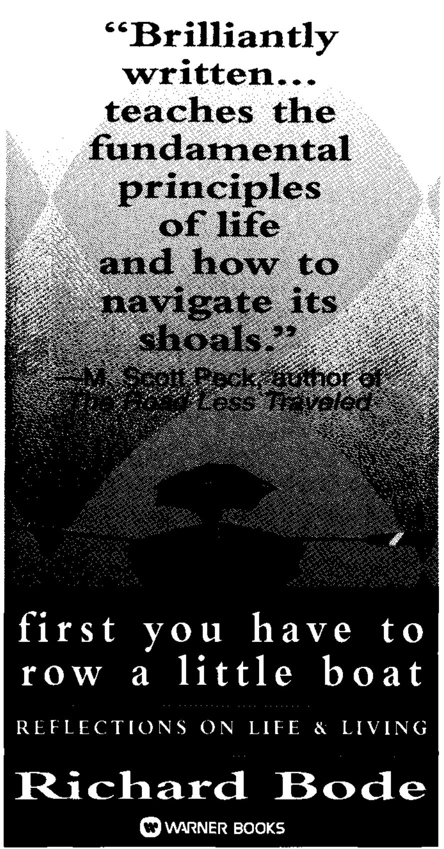

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about my recent bad luck. Lost the girl, computer crashed, very sick, attacked by reviewers, rejected by publishers and producers. I'm having a splendid time. I imagine him laughing. Then it occurs to me nobody writes letters anymore. Then I think: David will find my letter annoying. It will make him feel put upon, as though he has to respond in kind. Next he'll wonder if I'll keep his letter with my papers. Then he'll wonder if someday my kids will sell his letter through Sotheby's. I tear up my letter.

• April 8, 1995. Herb and Marion invite me to dinner at Chez Panisse. Herb asks what I'm reading. I say Bernard Williams, "Shame and Necessity," and I babble about his discussion of Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter. Goes berserk. Hacks her up so the ships can sail off to war. Say it reminds me of the time I was fired by Buckwalter, headwaiter at the Nevele Country Club. Buckwalter, with his big belly and big black voice, accused me of stealing a steak, went berserk in the dining room and fired me. Later, privately, he said my job was guaranteed for the next summer, but I had to go now: I was the last waiter he hired, and the dining room was overstaffed. Just like what Aeschylus says about Agamemnon: Buckwalter "put on the harness of necessity" and went nuts, falsely accusing me, then firing me.

Marion then says, "Herb doesn't know how to fire anyone. He begins by praising, trying to protect the person's dignity. When he's finished the person has no idea he's been fired."

If I hadn't stayed up half the night reading about Agamemnon, I'd never have learned this about Herb, whom I've known since I was a kid. What did I learn? Herb Sandler, president of the third-largest savings and loan in America, has trouble firing people. I've always known he was a good guy, but if the world knew, Herb would lose all power to terrify. His empire would collapse. He sits there, helpless, smiling at me.

• April 22, 1995. Wake in the middle of the night coughing. As always, I start to brood and think there is nobody to talk to. Haven't got a friend in the world. It's the middle of the night. Who the hell would I talk to? But I persist in thinking I have no friends and it's always the middle of the night. Then I think maybe I'm a real writer. Real writers never have anybody to talk to. If they had, none would write. What I mean is too deep for me to understand. Nevertheless, the truth. So back to sleep, conscience clean.

• May 8, 1995. Norman Mailer was onstage at the Herbst Theatre, then going to a club; I say I'll see him there around ten. I look forward to talking about gout because Norman gave me my first colchicine tablet, in 1987, in Havana, when my knee ballooned while I was dancing the mambo. Norman and his beautiful Norris, each taking an arm, helped me to climb the steps of the Palacio, my knee raging and fat. Inside the marble hall Fidel stood greeting visitors to the film festival, wearing his tailored green uniform and talking to Beatriz Valdés, the actress who starred in "La Bella del Alhambra." From Fidel's posture and the dignified way he tilted toward her face and breasts, hands clasped behind his back, you could see that he approved of her. Someone said Fidel had never once danced the mambo, which is incredible for a Latin male.

At the club the jukebox is blasting a soprano. Jeanette Etheredge draws me aside to ask what I think of the party. I say there is no risk of personal conversation. She names the people in the crowd for me, and I listen carefully and nod and forget each name instantly. Eldridge Cleaver walks up and says, in surprisingly gentle style, that he came home and found his landlord's sister sleeping in his bed, wearing his nightgown, and that she'd taken all the papers that he'd spent months arranging and thrown them on the floor in a big pile and then kicked them. He stops talking when a beautiful blond girl walks by, and says to her, "Well, hello to you," and then resumes telling us about his landlord's sister. After a while I move on and take a chair beside Norman, who is drinking boilermakers and signing copies of his new book and explaining that chasing bourbon with beer is superb for the smoothness. It is obvious that he isn't thinking about his gout, so I don't bring up the subject, but then feel unable to talk about anything else, so I just watch him drink and receive company, and he looks better and better, signing books, talking, drinking more and more. ♦

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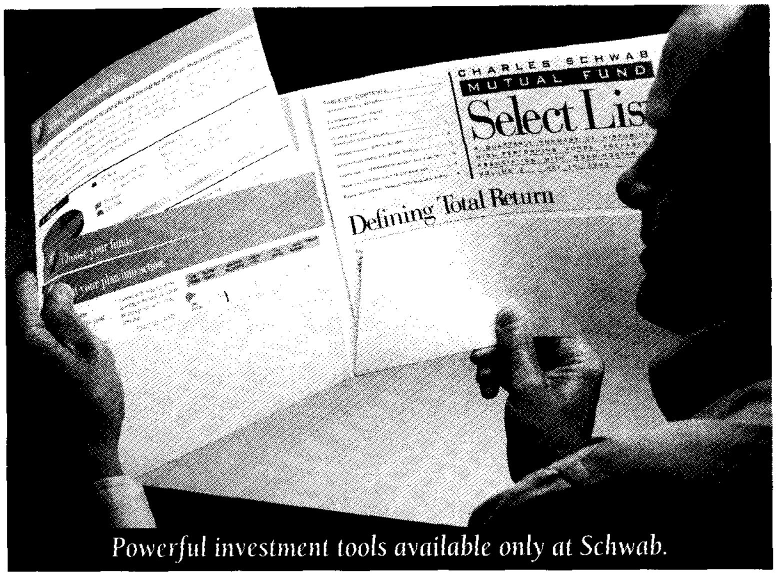
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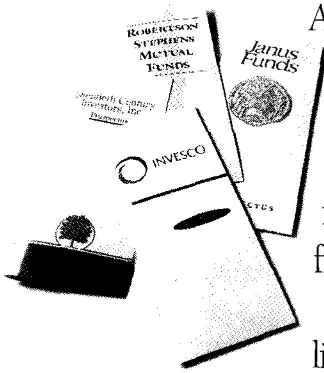

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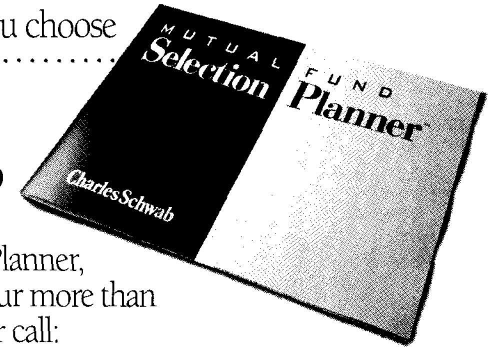

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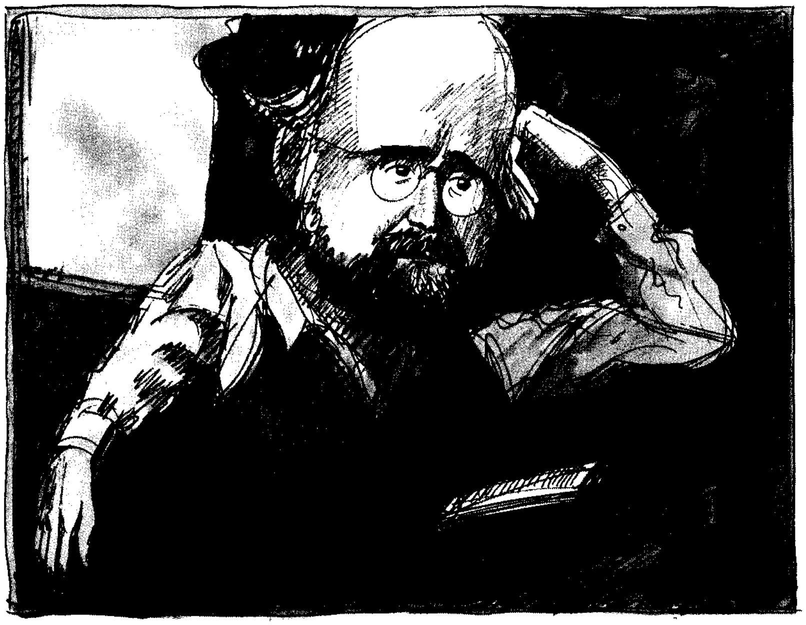
JOURNALS

MY LIFE AS HAROLD

Before the author was a published novelist, he experimented with the third person in his diary.

BY NICHOLSON BAKER



He had felt very light, very scooped-out; uncertain of everything, of what he should do.

EDWARD SOREL

MARCH 8, 1983. Harold got up after Margaret had left for work; and it was a measure of his new uncertainty that he gave his morning dreams some thought. Normally he was contemptuous of them, and uninterested by them, but whenever he suffered a setback, or felt very fragile, his interest in the irrational sky-rocketed. Thus the day before, falling asleep while reading Nicolson's "Peacemaking 1919," he had dreamed that Nicolson himself was describing a certain caterpillar that climbed on the trees at night on his estate: even from three miles away, the fur on these caterpillars [was] lit up by the car headlights on the country road—golden caterpillars. He had only paid attention to this because, the evening before, Margaret had read a draft of his essay, and had been uncertain; had not liked it—though with all of her beautiful hesitation and gentleness restraining her from saying so. She apologized many times for her slight, halting criticisms, burying her face in his chest, knowing how sensitive he was to not being liked. And indeed he had felt very light, very scooped-out, since; uncertain of everything, of every priority, of what he should do. His response was to wander around the city, feeling no pressure to do anything, no interest in books; yet thinking constantly: it was this strange, lucid uncertainty, more than anything else, that flowed from his disappointment. Questions he felt to be solved seemed suddenly newly puzzling; he was unsure how one's life should be ordered; he talked to himself; phrases that he had been proud of in his essay sprung before his mind and seemed childish and embarrassing; he felt the fear of having no real competence, of having only the aggravated sense of how far he had come on pride alone; how much this pride outdistanced any true skill he had; how terribly close he was, at all times, to being undistinguished in any way.

• MARCH 9, 1983. He walked up Boylston Street, on the north side of the street: the side of construction and pharmacies and restaurants, rather than the side of the library, which slowly rearranged its points of perspective, slowly unfolded new walls, and swung others in, slowly moved its corners nearer its middle; and his strong, gray self-reliance dispersed, forced by its own excited forward movement to scoop up little worries it could not handle—worries such as whether wide reading, by making him too tolerant, was making him aware that everything that has been or could be theoretically objected to has been done well at some time, in some author's hands; that no subject or style could be objectionable a priori; whether this worry would force to seep from him the narrowness, the false conviction of unique worth in a subject or style, the bigotry that held down the rivalry of extraneous choices that would, without it, throng unchecked in him, taking away the possibility of good work. Yet again he was able to force this worry into a distant rural village, by reaffirming that the prospects of distortions imposed from without, by tradition, by the events of his life, were to be viewed, no matter how real they were, with indifference; for still, distorted or no, he had only his own fingertip search for the truth to rely on: such worries were only part of it, they were not corrupting it. He realized again the urgent importance of proportion, and regarded his intellectual life as similar to making the rounds in a tropical herbarium: ceaselessly circling a multitude of different inquiries, which changed shape slightly when he was away from them: that was what made it different from simultaneous chess exhibitions. When the truth was simple, his record of it would be simple; when the truth was alive with many half-turns and qualifications, he would be difficult: simplicity for its own sake, and difficulty for its own sake, held now an entirely different, dull, wrong feeling for him. If the truth had been said many times before, he would nonetheless regard it with unabated interest, for how could he himself have grown bored with it just because it sat on shelves? And if the truth was entirely new, he would not intermix it with reigning falsehoods to ease its passage.

A strong cold wind blew against him, and as he buttoned his overcoat and felt how easily the buttons passed through the buttonholes, he decided that, if his life held nothing else out to him from that moment on, if it had to be passed in loneliness and poverty, it would nonetheless be a good, happy life—made happy and rich by the large, lucid fact of this overcoat. It was made of blue cashmere. There are certain things that seem so fine as to be impossible: Margaret said that baklava, with its hundreds of flaky layers, was too good to exist—she gave him some to try, and he was amazed at its complexity; it felt as if he were eating an entire civilization; it was not an experience of dessert, but of archeology. So it was with cashmere, blue cashmere coats. They were light, as light as the lightest pastry, yet rich and warm: he felt as if he were wearing the ideal prose style when he put on his coat. He had come to own it in the following way: he had felt disillusioned with his old coat for a long time—it made him look tall and odd, small-headed, and its lining had holes in it, one of which annoyingly would snag the pen he kept in his back pocket, and steal it from him: he would think he had lost his favorite pen, a gift from his father, black gunmetal and very beautiful, and would look everywhere, finally discovering it with relief and disgust, hanging from the hole in his coat lining. He [had] planned that if he sold an essay he was working on, he would buy a new coat, and he went to several stores; but the only coats that seemed truly worth owning were priced at six hundred dollars. He sold the essay, and on the evening before he was to leave Boston for Rochester to visit his family for Christmas, he passed a little store in Cambridge—owner retiring, closeout, and so on. They had only two coats left, a tan camel's hair, not terribly distinguished, and a blue cashmere. Miraculously, providentially, the cashmere coat was his size. Still, when he thought about the coincidence of their having that coat in his size—a very difficult, tall, thin size—he grew amazed. It was 300 dollars, down from 475: a huge sum: a year's worth of books.

• MARCH 10, 1983. He had impoverished himself to buy a coat; not by Gogol's standards, of course, but by American standards; yet without the possibility of wearing a blue coat of cashmere, without other, analogous possibilities—moments when a sea creature leaps up into a rarer, finer medium—having sufficient money for haircuts and meals felt dry and pointless, like a commonwealth without its aristocracy. Food and shelter were the commonfolk, which, in accordance with those old notions that sound so strange to us, found in the sight of pomp and greatness the reason they were there: Harold's blue coat was his life's royalty, and his needs stared upon it from the side of the boulevard and felt joy, and were ennobled. ♦

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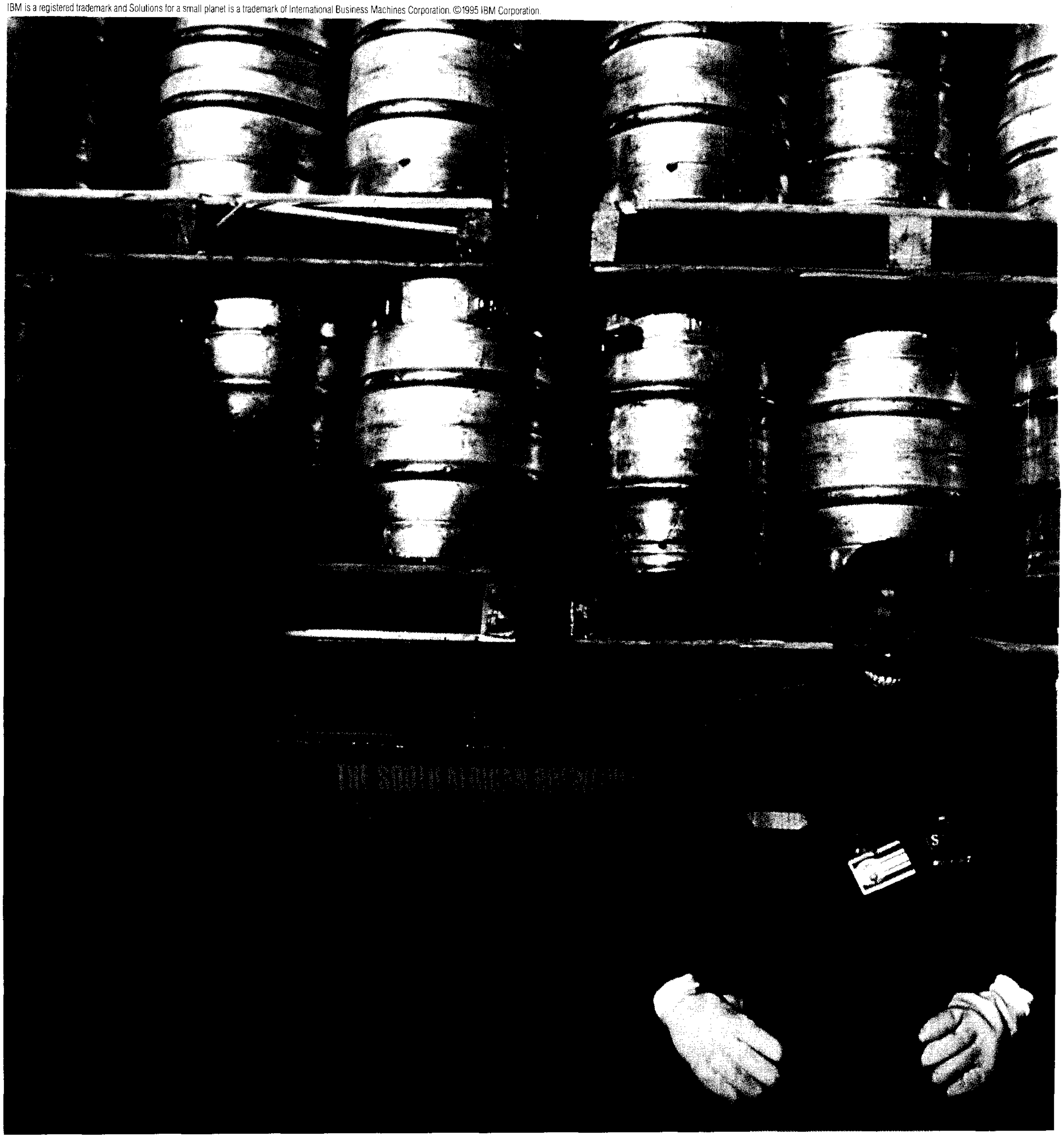

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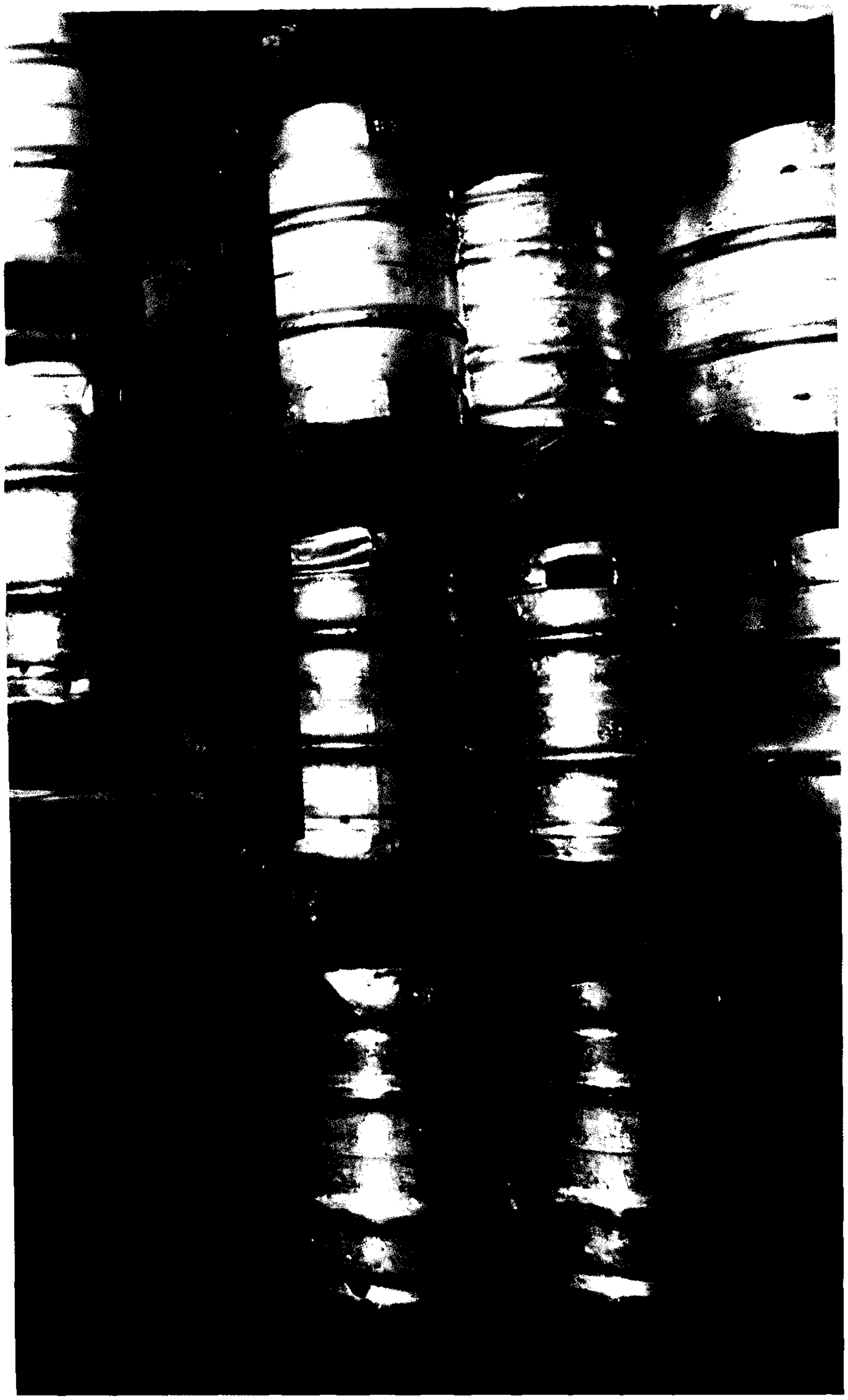

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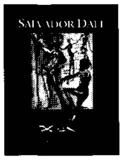

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THE PUBLISHING WORLD

BUY MY BOOK, PLEASE

The author, on the road with his novel "The Information," once again surrenders to the peculiar pleasures of the contemporary American book tour.

BY MARTIN AMIS

A COINAGE has forged itself within the media community of the West Coast: "O.J.," as a *verb*. Thus, "to O.J." Or, passively (and much, much more commonly), "to be O.J.-ed" or "to *get* O.J.-ed." "O.J.-ing," generally, has nothing to do with sports or movies or sexual jealousy. It has to do with media reschedulings caused by extra coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial.

"People are always getting O.J.-ed off of things," explains Kathi Goldmark, my media escort in San Francisco.

"So for example you'd say . . . ?"

" 'Norman Mailer was going to do national TV, but he got O.J.-ed off of it.' "

I glance at my schedule and say, "Look! I'm meant to do a radio interview at eleven-thirty. Live. But it says here they'll tape it if I get O.J.-ed."

Among other things, Kathi runs a band called the Rock Bottom Remainders, composed of writers—with, for instance, Stephen King on rhythm guitar and Amy Tan on backup vocals. Like Amy, Kathi is a Remainderette; she plays me a live tape of the band as we drive around town. Amy Tan's voice is deep and steady, and also mysterious. On her car phone Kathi calls Amy about something else (a favor to me: I want to pick Amy's brains). Kathi gets *Amy's* car phone, which is answered by Mrs. Stephen King, who hands her over to Amy. And Kathi hands Amy over to me.

After my reading, at the bookstore in Berkeley, Kathi and I dine with Jessica Mitford. Kathi has recently started up a record company called Don't Quit Your Day Job. Jessica's nickname, Decca, happens to be the name of a record company, but it is on the Don't Quit Your Day Job label that Decca has just released her first CD: a redoubtable rendering of "Maxwell's Silver Hammer." Decca is currently updating her classic study "The American Way of Death" (which reads like a nonfiction version of "The Loved One"). But there remains the question of the follow-up to "Maxwell's Silver Hammer." We tentatively decide on "When I'm Sixty-four," which should be appropriately retro, because Decca is seventy-seven.

I know this will feel like a dream when I get back to England. For now, though, I think I like all the cultural unfastidiousness and postmodern promiscuity here. "To O.J.," I think, is a *good* verb, and a welcome guest to my prose. But you do have to remind yourself, from time to time, that O.J. stands accused of cutting his ex-wife's head off.

There he sits, magnificently, everywhere you happen to be—our contemporary Othello.

UN-O.J.-ED, in Los Angeles, I do Tom Snyder, but find that I have been fractionally Shirleyed—by Miss MacLaine. My spot dwindles as Shirley talks interestingly and at length about "Terms of Endearment" and Jack Nicholson's various readings of the line "To kill the bug that you have up your ass." Remember? Come to Laugh. Come to Cry. Come to "Terms." It wasn't any good and won about nineteen Oscars, and I particularly disliked the way Jack Nicholson read that line about the bug.

The chauffeuring firm has nothing smaller, so the next morning I am stretched to the Art Deco toy town of Burbank Airport. Shortly after takeoff, the person beside me swivels and says to the person behind me, "Can I bug you for a couple of autographs?"

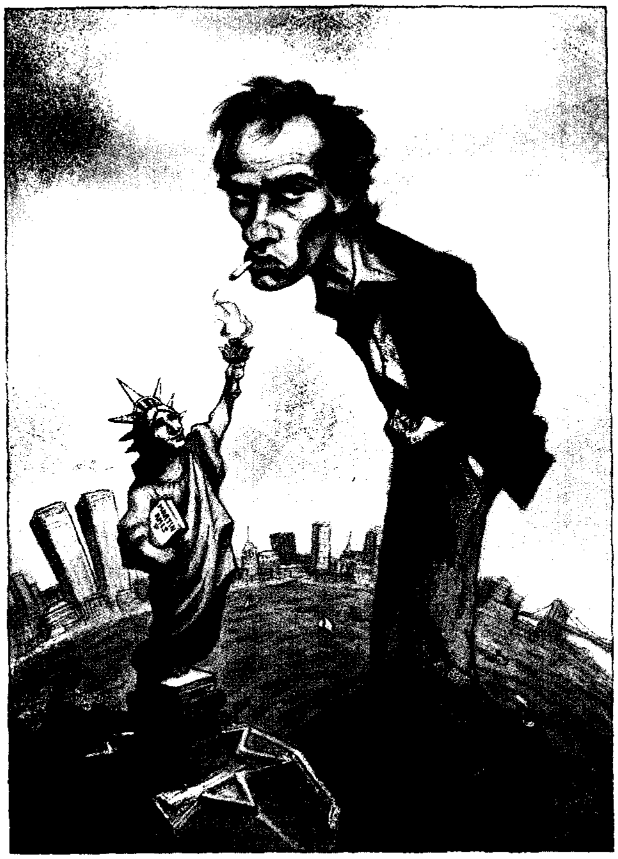
A moment later, I ask the person beside me about the person behind me.

"It's Jack Nicholson," he whispers, and adds, not at all accusingly, "He seems a little grouchy."

I don't turn and stare at him. But I resolve to go to the can soon, so I can stare at him on the way back. Then *Jack* goes to the can. He returns, and I stare at him: loose black suit, sunglasses, and the authentic movie-star aura—which comes from his seeming deeply familiar and deeply unfamiliar, simultaneously. He *does* seem grouchy; melodramatically so. For a while, he lingers in the aisle, flexing his face with great actorly glowers and frowns and scowls. He notices the book I am reading—"The Adventures of Augie March," by Saul Bellow. As the proprietor of the movie rights to Bellow's "Henderson the Rain King," Jack would notice this. The person beside me eventually gets his autographs: duly personalized.

We land and prepare to disembark. Nicholson turns up his grimace dial an additional notch. Uncharitably, I assume that this is the look all movie stars wear when they find themselves on non-private airplanes. But later I learn that Nicholson has some heavy family trouble in this part of the world. He may be a movie star, but he, too, has his internal chores and labors to perform.

As does O.J.—but he doesn't show it. O.J. is an actor, and he has been told to do Serenity. His profile is like something on an ancient coin. Innocent or guilty, he can't be *feeling* serene. Desdemona is gone, as is Cassio. But Iago is still around—inside his head.



Earlier in the tour, the nightly reading felt like an ordeal. But by now it is almost as enjoyable as a bad habit.

PETER DE SÈVE

As a rule, writers scorn their youngers and revere their elders. This is a literary law. And I propound it almost nightly in the Q. & A. sessions that follow the readings from my book.

"Does your father like your work?"

No, I explain. My father has read my first, third, and seventh novels, and none of the others. He can't get through them. He sends them windmilling through the air after twenty or thirty pages. But then my father, these days, mostly reads thrillers. Some time ago, he vowed that he would never read another novel that didn't begin with the sentence "A shot rang out."

More generally, I go on, older writers *should* find younger writers inimical, because younger writers are sending them an unwelcome message. They are saying, "It's not like that anymore. It's like this." In the present context, "that" and "this" can be loosely described as the thought-rhythms peculiar to your time. Implicit in these thought-rhythms are certain values, moral and aesthetic.

Somerset Maugham had this to say about my father's first novel, "Lucky Jim": "Mr. Kingsley Amis is so talented, his observation so keen, that you cannot fail to be convinced that the young men he so brilliantly describes truly represent the class with which his novel is concerned." The remark has been widely quoted. But it is incomplete and misleading. The next sentence runs as follows: "They are scum."

American cities are so much better, so much more *citified*, than English cities.

London is the equivalent of New York. Then what have we got? Manchester is our Chicago. Birmingham is Washington. Newcastle is Los Angeles. Leeds is Detroit. Liverpool is Boston. Bristol is Miami. Portsmouth is New Orleans. Reading is Houston. Stoke is Kansas City. Grimsby is San Francisco.

In Boston, I have breakfast with Saul Bellow, who turns eighty this year, and who, uncannily, continues to hear the thought-rhythms of the directly contemporary.

I also encounter two inadmissibly promising juniors, both of them English: Will Self, again in Boston, and Lawrence Norfolk, in Chicago. These younger writers cause me to defy my own literary law: I like them. They *aren't* scum. Examining the perverse affection I feel, I find that my protective instincts have been awakened. Twenty-odd years ago, when I started out, you wrote a novel and handed it in and that was that. There was a coherent reading public, prompted by word of mouth. There was no fourteen-city tour. There was no collateral activity whatever. At thirty-something, Will Self and Lawrence Norfolk are already old hands at doing the media circuit. For them, the current arrangement—whereby your personality (whatever that may be) undergoes public processing—is simply the air they breathe. I had ten years of quiet; but they were born into noise.

At the readings, I continue to be surprised by the forceful laughter that greets the line "Poets don't drive." I am pleased to hear this laughter, but I don't understand it. Are they laughing because it's funny that poets don't drive? Or are they laughing because it sounds like a ridiculous generalization?

Anyway, it's true. Poets don't drive. A vivid personification of this fact is my friend James Fenton, now Oxford Professor of Poetry, who has failed his test six times. But he is hardly typical. Nearly all the poets I know have never even had a lesson. They just intuit that they're not cut out for it.

Poets, of course, are great pashas (and great drinkers), who like being ferried about by their fans. Novelists (those

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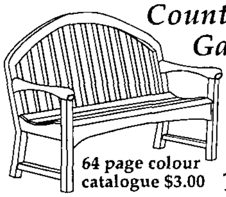

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nerveless brutes, those veteran A-to-B jockeys) bomb around the whole time in their Saabs and V.W.s. When you drive, the streets and their grids plug themselves into some low-rent section of the brain. Some dud bit of the brain. Novelists are pashas and drunks, too; but they do have this dud bit of the brain. Poets don't have this dud bit—the bit marked AUTOMOBILE.

The picture may well be very different in the United States, where the cult of personal mobility—and the distances—are much more serious. Maybe, in America, poets drive, but drive badly. Did Lowell drive? Did *Berryman*? I want to see the math on this.

Poets shouldn't drive. And that's the truth. It took the twentieth century, with its cars, to tell us something about poets' brains.

My father is a poet as well as a novelist—a big difference between us. I know he is a real poet because he doesn't drive. He can drive. He just doesn't.

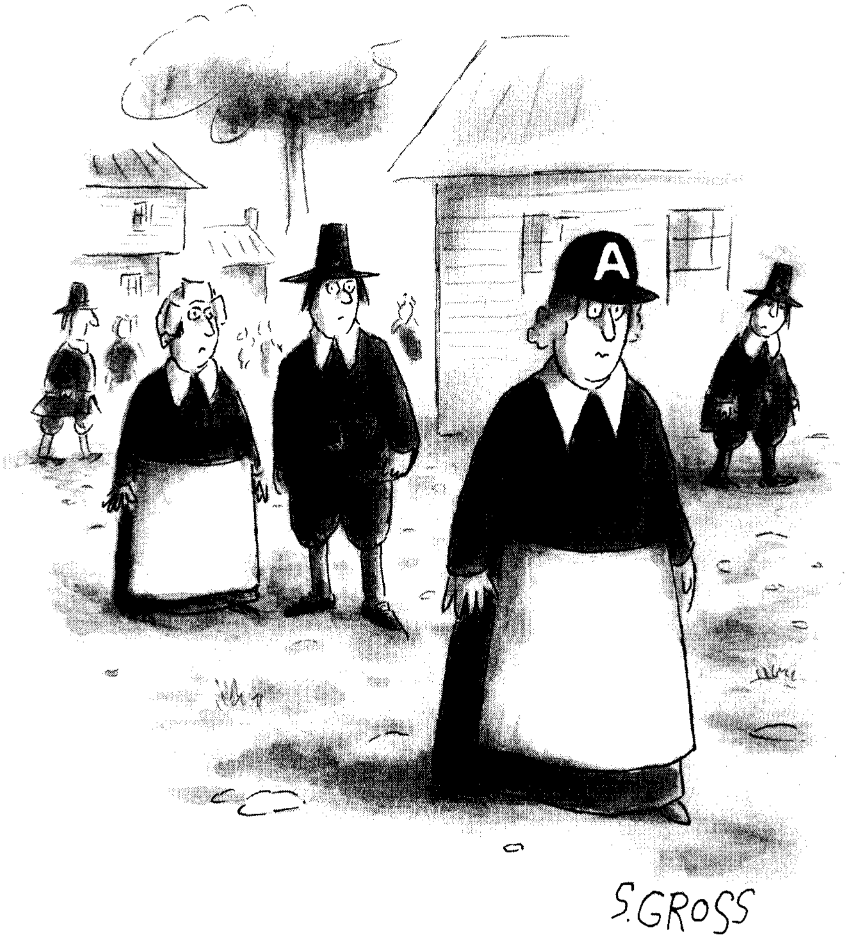
OUT in the Midwest, the word "Johnson" is constantly on my case. Everyone is called Johnson. I am reminded of the old loggers' song quoted by Kurt Vonnegut:

> My name is Yon Yonson
> I come from Wisconsin. . . .

Everyone is called Johnson. And everything is called Johnson. Everywhere is called Johnson: streets, creeks, forts, bridges.

Colloquially, "Johnson" has two meanings. It signifies the male organ, as in this snippet from Bellow's "The Dean's December": "I held the man's Johnson for him. You understand what I'm saying? I held his dick for him to pee in the flask." A "Johnson" is also a regular guy and a standup American. "A Johnson honors his obligations," writes William Burroughs in "The Place of Dead Roads." "A Johnson minds his own business, will give help when help is needed." In Madison, I get a fax from Will Self, reminding me to look up his friend Paul Ingram at Prairie Lights bookstore in Iowa City. "Paul Ingram," writes Self, "is a Johnson." In Iowa City, I have a lively dinner with Paul Ingram, in a joint called something like Johnson's. Paul is definitely a Johnson of the second kind.

By this stage of the tour, I am won-



dering what kind of Johnson *I* am: a robotically garrulous and insanely peripatetic hireling of my own novel. Later, on the West Coast, John Marshall of the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* begins our interview by saying, "The woman I share a desk with read that piece about you in *Vanity Fair* and said it made you seem like a real asshole."

"That's true enough."

Some interviewers have read your book twice and are bubbling with quotes from it. Others haven't even finished the dust jacket—or even started it. Mr. Marshall is somewhere in the middle: robustly professional. I am a part of his weekly routine. Still, the hour and a half passes swiftly and pleasantly.

"Nice meeting you," he says.

"Nice meeting you. Oh, and tell that bitch I'm not an asshole."

Tell her I'm a Johnson.

PEOPLE say that novelists, nowadays, are like rock stars.

Where have they been living?

It's been that way for years.

This is my fourth World Tour, and there's *still* something I can never get right. Every evening, as I prepare to abandon the ruined hotel room and search for my signing pen among the crack pipes and the splayed and sated groupies (or "inkies," as we novelists prefer to call them), I keep trying to throw the TV out of the window and into the swimming pool. And the TV always lands in the flower bed or on the patio. For some reason my aim is much truer with the fax machine and the minibar.

AFTER reading at Book Soup, on Sunset Boulevard, in Los Angeles, I eat there with an old school friend and his wife, the three of us roosting on stools at the bar in order to persist with our smoking. Seated in a line beside me are ten or eleven people; and everyone is displaying at least one copy of a book by me.

This sight gives me the purest rush of authorial megalomania. I think: That's what the world is *supposed* to be like. All bars should be like this bar. Nobody should even think of going anywhere without a Martin Amis.

THROUGHOUT the trip "The Adventures of Augie March" provides the ballast for my equilibrium. It keeps telling me what really matters.

I am trying to see the process from the outside. You are pinched and prodded, you are on exhibit, you are inspected, then lauded or disdained. All day you are talking into a mike: everything you say is amplified or recorded or transmitted. This article says you are a Johnson of the second kind; that article says you are a Johnson of the first kind, and of the first order. You are quoted and misquoted, represented and misrepresented. You tell yourself to hold something back but you can't hold anything back—because your novel is out there, too, on display, and your novel holds nothing back. One way or another, you are being *exposed*. This can't be work, you think, because it doesn't feel honest. But it is work.

Denver marks the end of the road—and the end of the book. On page 527, I draw a vertical line in the margin and write "Yes!" Bellow is talking about the emotional labor we all go in for, daily. There is nothing writerly about this labor. I do it. You do it. Jack Nicholson and O.J. do it. It is universal:

> Hard, hard work, excavation and digging, mining, moling through tunnels, heaving, pushing, moving rock, working, working, working, working, working, panting, hauling, hoisting. And none of this work is seen from the outside. It's internally done. It happens because you are powerless and unable to get anywhere, to obtain justice or have requital, and therefore in yourself you labor, you wage and combat, settle scores, remember insults, fight, reply, deny, blab, denounce, triumph, outwit, overcome, vindicate, cry, persist, absolve, die and rise again. All by yourself! Where is everybody? Inside your breast and skin, the entire cast.

Earlier in the tour, the nightly reading felt like an ordeal, then a hurdle, then a testing routine. But by now it is almost as enjoyable as a bad habit; and I expect no grief at Denver's Tattered Cover. Your readers are your supporters: they sustain this one-man team. A writer is nothing without a reader. A reader is needed to close the circle. A story is nothing without a listener. And this is ancient knowledge. Yet in the age of publicity the bond seems to require public confirmation. "Could you personalize that for me?" "Sure. What's your name?" Meet the Author is becoming Meet the Reader. And I find it to be emotionally necessary. Laboring through all the other stuff they get from the outside world, writers may come to need such displays or enactments of solidarity and affection. I think this is the way it is going. ♦

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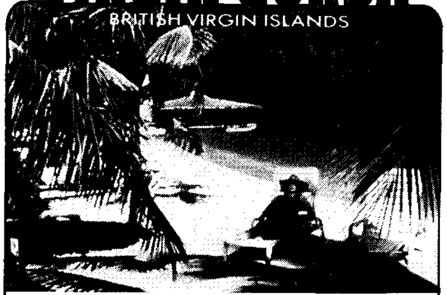

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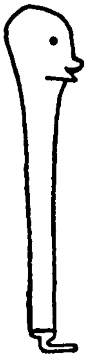

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FICTION

MATHS CLASS

BY SEAMUS DEANE

EVERY+ morning, at nine(o'clock) sharp, he came rushing into the room, his soutane swishing, his face reddened as if in anger, his features oddly calm. We would be ready, with the thick tome of algebra open at the right page and as many questions as possible prepared in advance. He spoke nasally but smilingly. He had tight curls, and glasses; but for the redness, he could have looked harmless. His name was Gildea.

He sat at the high desk, raised on a platform above the class. He lifted his chin, closed his eyes, and chanted:

"Mental algebra. Ground rules. Well known but must be repeated—first, for the sake of the brain-dead and the memoryless, who are in the usual staggering majority; second, as a warning to those more fortunately endowed but who take a litigant's pleasure in claiming that they had not been told, that they did not know, that the rules were not clear. I lie awake at night, imagining for these creatures a condign punishment; yet I have failed. Does this bespeak in me a failure of imagination or in them an unanswerable corruption? You may answer the question, McConnellogue."

"I'm afraid I cannot, Father," McConnellogue replied automatically. This was routine.

"Your sorrow is touching. Perhaps you do not realize the importance of the question. Harkin, be so good as to inform McConnellogue what a litigant is."

"A litigant is a person who creates disturbances by abuse of the rule of law, Father."

"Do you agree with that superb definition, McConnellogue?"

"Absolutely, Father."

"You are not litigious, McConnellogue, are you?"

"No, Father."

"I shall test you in that statement. Are you more literate or more numerate as a consequence of my loving care five times a week, forty minutes per time, McConnellogue?"

"I am equally blessed in both respects, Father."

"Would you say that McConnellogue will go far, Heaney?"

"I would, Father."

"Under what conditions would you say so, Heaney?"

"Under the conditions imposed by the question, Father."

"Are you conversant with these conditions, Doherty?"

"I am, Father."

"What's your name, Doherty?"

"Doherty, Father."

"Glad to hear it. Now, ground rules. We have here forty simple sums in algebraic form, to each of which there is only one correct answer. There are, in this room, forty boys. One sum for each. The coincidence is pleasing. We begin with Johnson, the strange-looking creature in the left-hand corner of the front row. He gives the answer to No. 1 in no more than two seconds. If he takes longer, he will be deemed to have given a wrong answer. McDaid, the object next to Johnson, takes No. 2, and so on throughout the whole zoolike assemblage we, in our politeness, call a class. However, if Johnson is, in McDaid's considered opinion, wrong in No. 1, he, McDaid, does No. 1 over again and gives the correct answer. If the person next to McDaid happens to believe that Johnson was right in No. 1 and McDaid wrong to correct him, he skips No. 2 and does No. 3; whereupon McDaid must, if he agrees with this verdict, do No. 2. Equally, the person next to McDaid also has the choice to believe that both Johnson and McDaid were wrong in No. 1; if he takes this choice, he does No. 1 over again. And so on. The choice enriches as one proceeds, so that by the time we reach that evolutionary cul-de-sac named Irwin, at the back of the class, the choice will be veritably kaleidoscopic. If any sum is done wrongly by any preceding student, whether that be immediately or more distantly preceding, the student who observes this must do that sum cor-

FILIP PAGOWSKI

rectly. If a sum is done incorrectly, the punishment is a mere two strokes. If a sum done correctly is incorrectly corrected, the punishment is four strokes. If the whole class misses a sum incorrectly answered, homework is doubled. If it misses more than one sum incorrectly answered, homework is doubled for the number of nights corresponding to the number of missed incorrect answers. If every sum is answered correctly, the sun will stand still in the heavens and I will take up the teaching of a secure and sure subject, like religion. Right. Johnson, proceed. Two seconds from now!"

Johnson began.

"*X* equals minus two."

McDaid followed.

"*X* equals three."

It went round, very fast. The row in front of me was into it now. Suddenly, Gildea intervened.

"What number are you doing, Harkin?"

"No. 13, Father."

"Fair enough. You evidently believe that No. 12 was correctly answered?"

Harkin hesitated. "Yes, Father."

"Fair enough. Your decision. Next man. Two seconds only."

"*X* equals four."

"What number was that?"

"No. 12, Father."

"You consider it was wrongly answered, then?"

"Yes, Father."

"So Harkin should have done it again?"

"Yes, Father."

"Harkin?"

"I believe No. 12 was correct, Father."

"And, with that, all preceding No. 12, otherwise you would have repeated one of them?"

"Yes, Father."

"Next man. Not you, Molloy. You have just corrected Harkin. The squalid thing beside you. Is it alive?"

"I am, Father." This was O'Neill.

"No exaggerations. Just give me your answer."

"*X* equals five, Father."

"And that is the answer to . . . ?"

"No. 13, Father."

"Ah. So Harkin was wrong to have done No. 13 and wrong in the answer he gave to it."

"Just wrong in the answer he gave to it, Father."

"Then No. 12 was, in your opinion, done correctly?"

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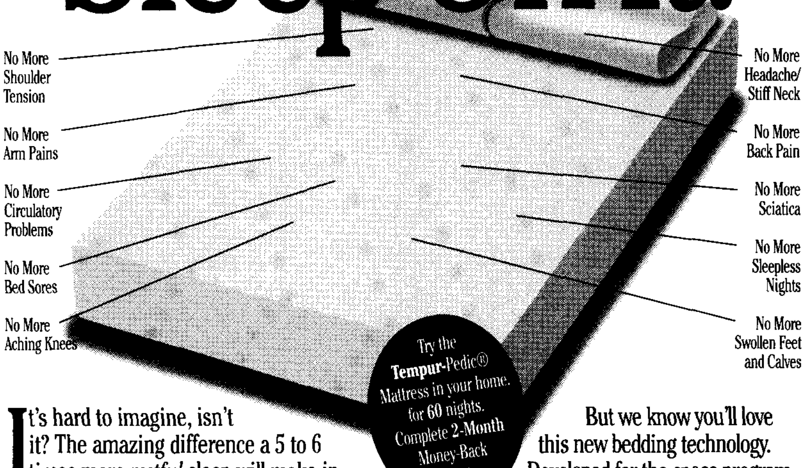
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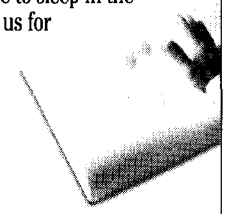

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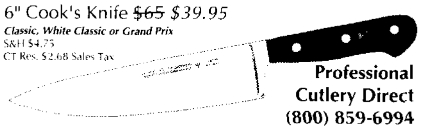
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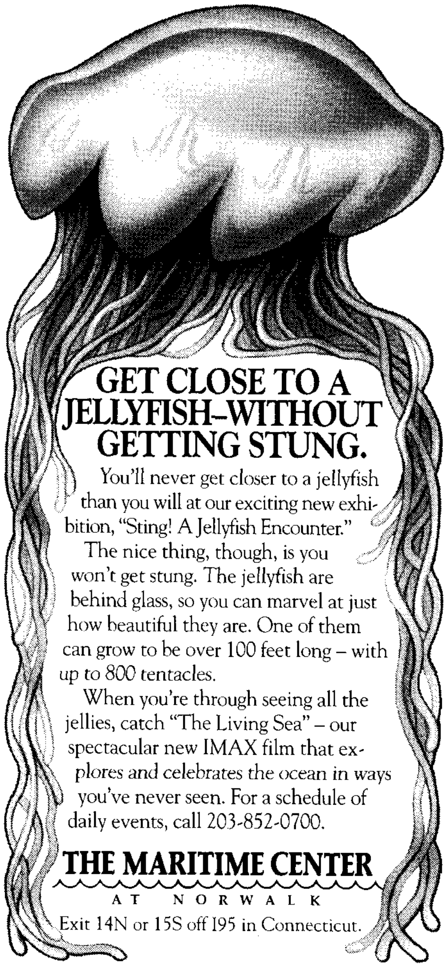

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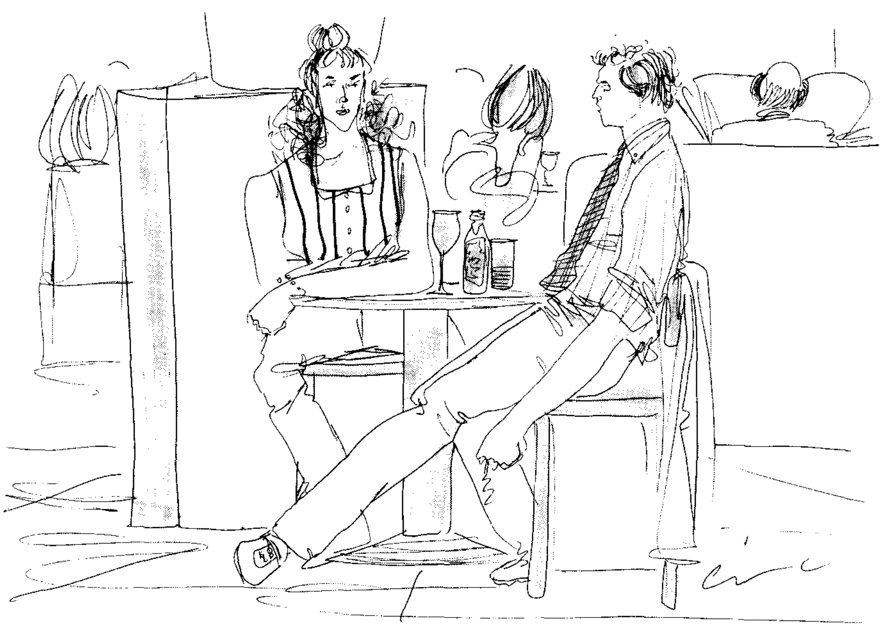


"Yes, I have the new Mailer. Loved the heft."

• •

"Yes, Father."

"Then Molloy was wrong in correcting No. 12?"

"Yes, Father."

"So why did you not do No. 12 again?"

"It had already been done correctly, Father."

"But the man preceding you had done it wrongly? Ground rules state that you correct the preceding error, right?"

"Yes, Father."

"Did you?"

"No, Father, but—"

"Quiet! What number are you going to do now?"

"No. 12, Father."

"Answer?"

"*X* equals four."

"This was a correction of Molloy? Yes?"

O'Neill had blundered and knew it. He just nodded.

"Molloy, your answer was 'four,' was it not?"

"Yes, Father."

"But that was wrong, I'm told. Now it's right. Where are we here? Is this mathematics or is it chaos?"

Silence. Gildea smiled.

"The difference should be discernible, even to you people. Doherty, proceed, unravel the mess."

"*X* equals two."

"What number was that the answer to?"

"No. 1, Father."

"You think the first sum was wrong?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sir? Sir? Have I altered in appearance? Has my Roman collar become a tie, my soutane a suit of moldy tweed?"

"No, sir."

"You insist on 'sir'?"

"Yes, Father."

The class tittered and then went still.

"A spark of wit; I enjoy that. It cannot go unpunished, of course. But to the point. The first sum was wrong, you say. So all since that have been wrong?"

"Technically, yes, sir."

"Technically? Ah, a litigant speaks."

"Just ground rules, sir."

"Were they or were they not wrong?"

"Some were wrong in themselves, sir. Some were wrong in that they were done before No. 1 was corrected, sir."

"Wonderful. A true litigant. You're sure of yourself, Doherty?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Right. Let's start all over again. First man, first sum."

"*X* equals minus two."

"You stand by that?"

"Yes, Father."

"Doherty was wrong then?"

"Yes, Father."

"All this trouble for nothing then?"

"Yes, Father."

"All agree?"

"Yes, Father." A chorus.

"Right, Doherty. Compute your error. One wrong answer—two strokes. One correct answer, 'corrected' wrongly by you—four strokes. Eleven perfectly correct or undisputed answers cancelled by you on the grounds that they should not have been given when in fact they should have—forty-four strokes. Waste of time—six strokes. Playing the professional litigant—twelve strokes. Insolent mode of address—ten strokes. Moment of wit—six strokes. Can you add that?"

"Eighty-four."

"Eighty-four what?"

"Eighty-four strokes."

"Eighty-four strokes, what?"

"Eighty-four strokes, sir."

"Right. We're getting somewhere. You can add, you are learning your catechism, you are about to learn a lesson about the overweening confidence that has always marked you and your ilk. What is it that this soothes my heart like?"

"Balm, sir."

"A correct answer at last. Out you come."

"No, sir. I was right. They are wrong."

"Oh, my. Oh, my. Doherty's right, everyone else is wrong. I see storm clouds gather. I see apocalypse threaten. We are all innumerate but Doherty. Harkin, do that sum again, on the blackboard this time. So we can all see."

Harkin scrawled on the blackboard.

"Can you refute that, Doherty?"

"No, sir."

"It's the correct answer?"

"Yes, sir. To the wrong sum."

"The wrong sum? *The wrong sum*? This is ecstatic. You surpass yourself. Explain, we're all agog."

"I'm doing Section B, sir. Everyone else is doing Section A."

"And why do you choose B when we all choose A?"

"Because we did Section A yesterday, sir. I assumed you did not want us to repeat what we already knew."

"Anyone else remember our doing Section A?"

"Yes, *sir*." A chorus.

"Did I specify Section B, Doherty?"

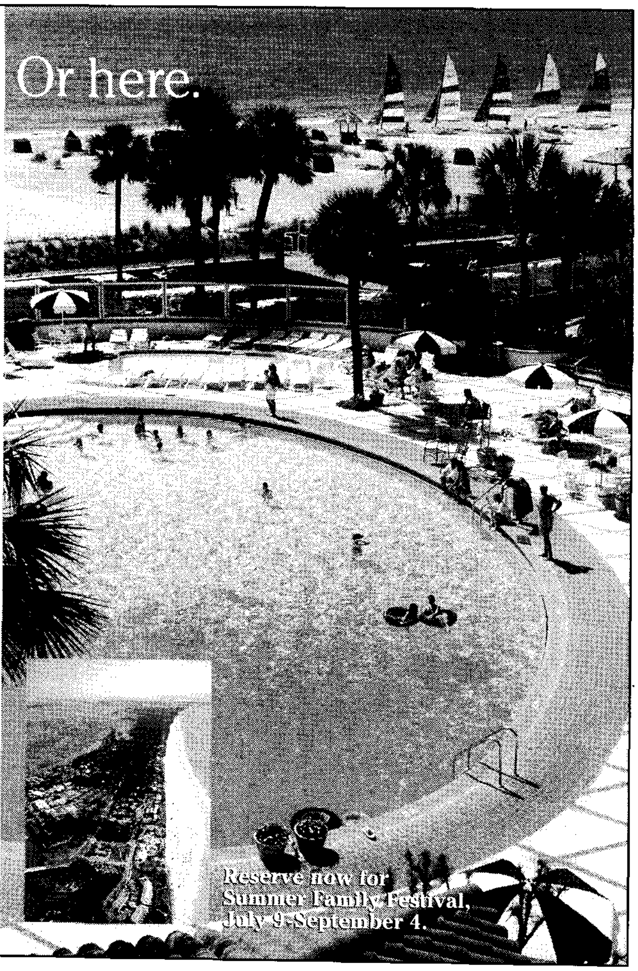
"No, sir, but you did not specify Section A, either."

"How many strokes do I owe you, Doherty?"

"None, sir."

"Your opinion, not mine. Class, stay in your seats. Do nothing. First boy I see do anything useful—two strokes. Doherty, leave the class. Class, homework doubled. Doherty, homework quadrupled."

He hunched over his desk, glaring. The door closed quietly behind Doherty. We stared into midair. ◆



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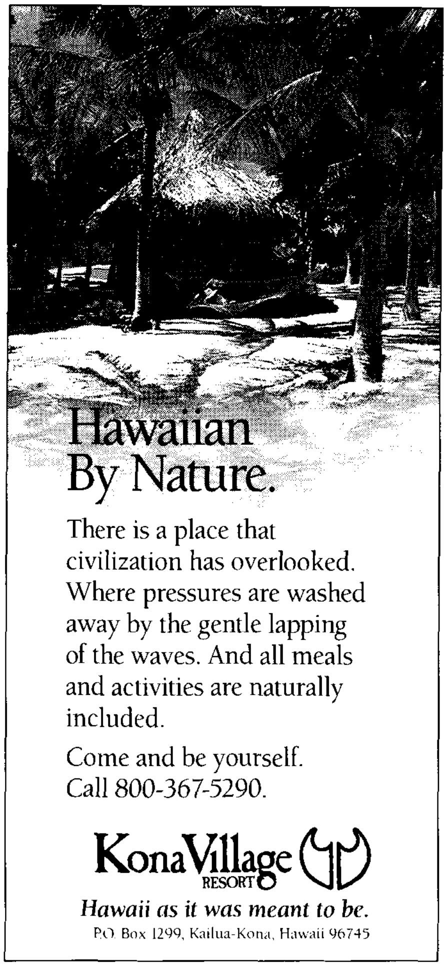

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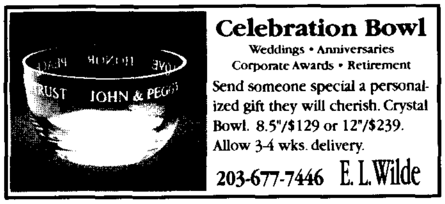

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JOURNALS

A DIAMOND TO CUT NEW YORK

Vignettes of the bohemian low life and the literary high life, and evidence of how one woman managed to fit an entire city into her classic social satires.

BY DAWN POWELL

MARCH 10, 1933. Ann called up and said that little gadget I wrote sold to *New Yorker* for $70. It would be strange if, after all these years of having my writer's reputation so different from my personal one, the two should finally merge. It has seemed obvious to me for years that I could do light writing better than many of the people now earning good monies at it but I have been consistently turned down and sweating at it spoils it, of course. There's no sense in working for comedy—it either succeeds or is *not*. But now it seems to me—having failed completely in all serious work, barely getting a reputation for *average*, let alone anything else—with this encouragement in the far-too-easy-for-me light touch I believe I may change.

• MARCH 22, 1933. A fire on Broadway and 8th with black smoke rolling over the block like black plush. Even after four hours the firemen were still working. It must have been a clothing store, for in the back, amid charred rafters and wrecked furniture, two firemen in great oilskins were trying on brand-new straw hats; one big man had a tiny Panama stuck on his head.

• JULY 18, 1933. This is the last month of my money from Farrar & Rinehart or from anywhere—from now on, nothing—and the morbidity has set in that invariably has its base in finance. I am appalled at this secret, iron determination to make money—to win the artistic esteem its possession automatically confers.

By this time next year I will have a fortune, have cut the throats of my best friends, have kicked my inferiors in the pants, have refused to be connected with any strangers except properly identified ones, and be loved and respected by all.

• FEBRUARY 12, 1934. I want this new novel to be delicate and cutting—nothing will cut New York but a diamond. Probably should do a night job on it as on "Tenth Moon"—it should not be a daylight book but intense and brilliant and fine like night thoughts.

• JULY 24, 1934. Reading snatches this weekend of Nancy Hale, Louise Bogan, Kay Boyle. I was impressed with how women now make their art serve their female purpose, whereas once it warred with their femininity. Each page is squirming with sensitivity, every line—no matter how well disguised the heroine is—coyly reveals her exquisite taste, her delicate charm, her never-at-a-disadvantage body which of course she cares nothing about. . . . Fit companions and opposites to the he-man writers—Hemingway, Burnett, Cain, whose words tersely proclaim their masculinity; every tight-lipped phrase shows guts (the author's), his decency, his ability to handle any situation: insurrection (he is an instinctive leader or else too superior to show it), shipwreck, liquor, women. Through the words shot out of the typewriter *clip-clip* one watches the play of his muscles, one sighs to lay one's head upon that hairy shoulder.

• NOVEMBER 22, 1935. In "Turn, Magic Wheel" I believe firmly that I have the perfect New York story, one woman's tragedy viewed through the chinks of a writer's book about her, newspaper clippings, café conversations, restaurant brawls, New York night life, so that the story is tangled in the fritter of New York—it could not happen anyplace else. The front she keeps up is the front peculiar to the New York broken heart; people's deeds and reactions are peculiarly New York. "What? Our friend committed suicide—that's terrible.... That's the kind of suit I'm going to get, there in Altman's...."

• MAY 29, 1936. To the Hickory House with Carl where Wingy Manone plays with his orchestra "I's a muggin'." I went in the Ladies' Room. The attendant, a thin, frizzed, middle-aged woman, put down *Liberty* magazine and said, "Well, the more you read, the less you know." I asked her what she was reading about, and she said politics. "I don't care what they say. I'll vote my straight Tammany ticket the same as always," she said. I said I didn't get around to voting much. "Well, you should, girlie," she said. "We women don't get much out of life anymore. Can't even get a seat on the subway since we got the vote." I went in the can. "How do you like this place, dear?" she asked. "Fine," I said. "Yes, I think so, too," she said. "It's homelike."

Outside, the great round bar was arranged like a merry-go-round. Inside was Wingy Manone, radio trappings, an announcer, three bartenders, a bull fiddle and an orchestra of moronic faces playing moronic music. Homelike was the word.

• OCTOBER 4, 1937. Bunny [Edmund] Wilson called up from hotel. "Come over here right away," he urged. "I just had a dream about you and I want to go over it with you."

• OCTOBER 13, 1940. To the Murphys' at East Hampton, now a background for the Dos Passos fatty degeneration, for they live and eat well, their beds are good beds, they are not idle rich but busy, good-living, intelligent idling rich; they are understanding and not personally fortunate. But what is a writer and observer of mores doing napping luxuriously in that cushioned shelter? A Proust would thrive here, a mathematician, a historian—but not a live creative mind in 1940. Here is the great temptation of all middle-age—comfort and security—but the surest death to the artist if accepted wholly.

Powell in the fifties. "I am still so amazed at the brazenness of people who only remember you when you've gone into your fourth printing."

DAWN POWELL PAPERS, RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

• SEPTEMBER 28, 1942. Moving to duplex at 35 East Ninth Street, which is considerably cheaper but much more deluxe-looking in a sort of modern-improvement Central Park West way. Old battered furniture looks very startled and terrible here but I will not give in to this place and pleasure it with that white decoration sort of thing—the bare tasteful simplicity of the places meant for bare, tastefully bleak personalities.

• NOVEMBER 22, 1942. A consciousness of sudden happiness—not exhilaration but rather of sudden orientation after months of circling. Actually nothing to cause it but an atmosphere of things being right, of an ability to command again, rather than to be preyed upon, an ability to choose and create, actually to hope. These moments, so rare, are also astonishing in their revelation of how deep your confusion has been up to that moment.

• DECEMBER 21, 1942. Out to lunch and this usual but new business of people *I* know but am sure don't recognize me waving to someone behind me and bowing and finally coming over and saying "Well, well, *Dawn!*" I am still so amazed at the brazenness of people who only remember you when you've gone into your fourth printing.

• FEBRUARY 7, 1943. Saturday, Peter Blume and his wife had an enormous cocktail party. Two famous wits were present....

(*Enter Perelman.*)

PERELMAN: Dawn, I hear your book ["A Time to Be Born"] is going like blazes. How many copies sold?

ME (*lying*): Why, I imagine around fifteen thousand.

PERELMAN: Ah, here's Thurber. You know Dawn.

THURBER: Hello, Dawn, how many copies did your book sell? Fifty thousand?

ME: Well, more like twenty.

THURBER: Understand you got

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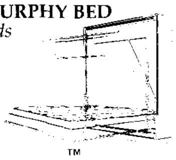

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$15,000 from the movies. Shoulda got more. Would've if you'd held out.

ME: Well, it would still all be gone now no matter what I got.

THURBER (*glancing around, though almost blind*): Big party. Musta set Peter back about fifty bucks. What'd he get for his picture?

PERELMAN: Do you realize that bastard Cerf takes 20 percent of my play rights, same as he did for "Junior Miss"?

THURBER: Shouldn't do it. Harcourt never took a cent off me. Had it in the contract.

PERELMAN: I'd like to have lunch with you and discuss that, Jim. Jesus, Jim—20 percent!

Thus does the wit flow from these two talented fellows.

• APRIL 2, 1943. Cocktails with Bunny. Just reading "Sentimental Education" myself, I find Bunny a great devotee of it. . . . He told me about looking over his own journal for notes on a certain ten-year love affair he had and that he found it was 100 typewritten pages and a masterpiece—his comments on the woman and his varying opinion of her. An invented character, he said, would have to be so consistent it could not be described in constantly varying lights but a real person is seen by another in ever-changing lights, perspective, etc. He said he had put down everything she said, they did, etc., and result is the "greatest love story ever written," in pornographic detail, so that he cannot publish it till after death.

• FEBRUARY 7, 1944. Letter from Hemingway very cheering. Said I was his favorite living writer.

• SEPTEMBER 29, 1945. My dear cat Perkins died today—very quietly, daintily, a lady wanting to give as little trouble as possible. She took sick Monday, with chills and bladder trouble, and threw up her fish. She knew and I knew that this was it. I cashed a bad check to take her to Speyer's where the vet gave me pills and medicine to give her which she hated. . . . Finally she lay on the balcony, exhausted, in the sun. I heard her choke, and she was in a convulsion, but I picked her up and put her in a chair where she managed to fix her sweet

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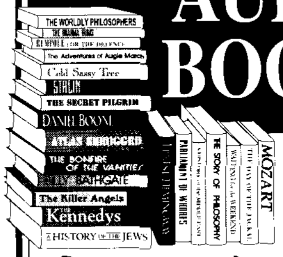

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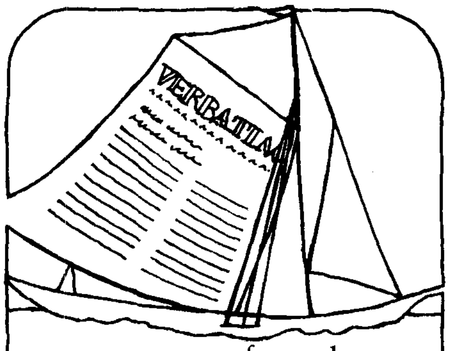

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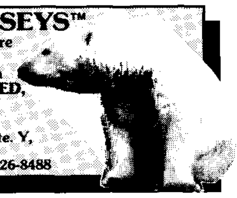

eyes on me while I held her paw. . . . It was unbearable.

Joe [Powell's husband] was in the country. I read Mrs. Trollope furiously all night, loving Mrs. T. for coming to my rescue. I hated even to give up the little soft dead body lying in the chair but fortunately the S.P.C.A. came in at Ann Honeycutt's call and took her. Otherwise I would have done away with myself. Perkins seemed the only lovely thing in life that cost nothing, asked nothing, and gave only pleasure.

Her major service to me was curious—she cured me of the disease of night fear. I stayed for weeks alone with her, hearing her rattling around the house. She waited like a modest bride till I was in bed with the lights out, then washed herself and leapt softly onto the bed, tucked herself in my neck and nuzzled off to sleep. It was wonderful to be unafraid.

I forgot my debt to her for this until the night after she died, when I was alone in the house and suddenly every sound once more became sinister—the escaped lunatic slowly turning the doorknob, the big brute creeping up the stairs. My cat analyst was dead and my phobias came plunging out of the pits and closets where they had been locked. I cannot have another pet—it would be unfaithful to my little dear who liked no one but me, knew no other cats, no mice, no love but mine. She thought she was my mother—was ashamed and outraged if I was noisy or loud-talking, slapped me if I was blah, avoided me scornfully if I was drunk, approved if I typed. She was the first pet in my life.

• OCTOBER 11, 1945. Bunny Wilson returned from Greece a few weeks ago and I saw a lot of him. All relations with Bunny are dictated by him—he is the one to name the hour, the place, the subject of conversation. After knowing him slightly several years I finally realize he is not at all what he seemed—he is totally unaware and violently allergic to whatever is going on. He is mystified and annoyed by the simple process of creation; he is furious at the things he does not understand—furious, blind, and bored. What he does not understand is all life that is not in print, so he sees people, invents a literary category for them, then locks them up in it, occasionally peeking at them through the

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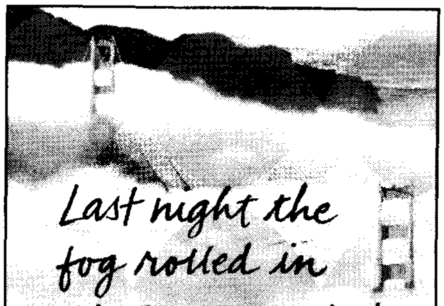

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iron bars of the peephole to say: "There you are, you in-love-with-father, hate-mother type, reacting exactly as your type does and any other way you act will not be observed by me."

He wants to see his ladies alone so he can attack them, leave them chastened and feeling limp, hopeless, unloved, unattractive. He has told them that they are looking well, that usually they look so unkempt, so dowdy; he has told them—on seeing their latest work—that he always felt their best work was done when they were twenty; he has told them that everything they like is impossible; everything they dislike is perfect and a test of intelligence and taste. He beams with joy and well-nourished nerves as he leaves, like a vampire returning from a juicy grave.

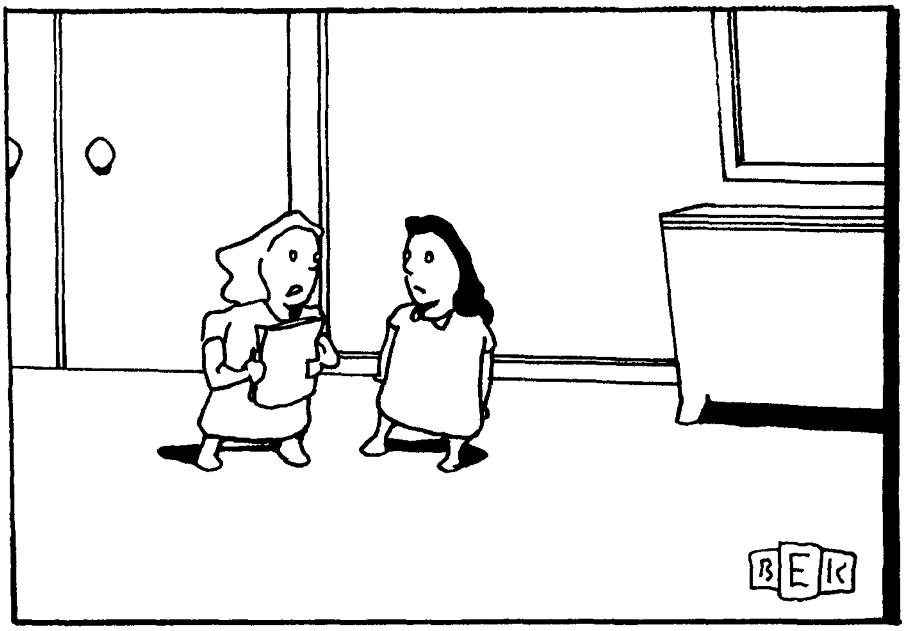
• APRIL 9, 1948. I read my book "The Locusts Have No King" with apprehension and was astonished to find it an admirable, superior work—no holes of plot as in other works—and a sustained intelligence dominating the farcical and exaggerated so that it had more unity and structural solidity than anything I ever did. In fact, a unique work, showing indubitable development. Advance sale is 3000 before New York.

• MAY 24, 1948. Gist of criticisms (Diana Trilling, etc.) of my novel is—if they had my automobile they wouldn't visit my folks, they'd visit *theirs*.

Again there is the shaking of heads over not writing about "nice people—people one likes." *Who* likes? *I'm* doing the work. I write about people *I* find interesting, largely because they are often representative. My readers and critics never recognize themselves. I find this country monstrously hypocritical—absolutely unable to stand the truth. A sort of ignorant belief in Party Manners for book people.

• DECEMBER 5, 1948. This year and last have been the age of the notebooks and journals—the promissory notes of the artist, as in international lending operations. James "Notebooks"; Trollope; Wharton; Delacroix; Melville. The Hasty Age (big business and Hollywood influence): we buy the prospectus because we have no time for the finished work.

• OCTOBER 25, 1951. You must remember that you don't know what people find in your work so there's no sense in trying to repeat it. You can only *do*, in the way that seems best to you. Like not knowing really why people like or dislike you—do they like your brains? No, it is your cooking and perhaps your apartment. Is it your conversation? No, it is the fact that occasionally you let others talk. So—for reassurance in finding some of your work so bad—remember, you don't know.



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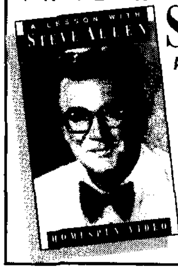

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• DECEMBER 13, 1951. I cannot see why Shaw was called a hermit, a snob, etc., when he—out of almost the whole world, being childless and single-minded—was merely a self-preserver, wasting no time on the ordinary day, idle questions, etc. His wife was a buffer for him but herself not social. In order for a genius to be a genius, he must have a selfless slave between him and the world so that he may select what tidbits he chooses from it and not have his brains swallowed up in chaff. For women this protection is impossible.

• MARCH 29, 1953. What novels have I liked best—

Sister Carrie—Dreiser
Dodsworth—Lewis
Sentimental Education—Flaubert
Satyricon—Petronius
Daniel Deronda—Eliot (partly)
Dead Souls—Gogol
Lost Illusions—Balzac
Distinguished Provincial—Balzac
Our Mutual Friend—Dickens
David Copperfield—Dickens
Jenny—Undset

• FEBRUARY 8, 1954. In last nine days, front pages have honored two writers. Hemingway crashed, reported dead, found again. Then, at the opposite extreme, Max Bodenheim murdered in a Third Avenue rooming house, all proving that violent deaths are the only thing that can give writers now any immortality.

• MAY 9, 1954. Read Gore Vidal's "Messiah." More impressed by the writer than the book, which was engaging enough, but the trouble . . . is that no characters can equal the author himself, whose muscular skill directs most complicated interplay of plots, guides contrapuntal themes with suave, veiled power and a doom-like rhythm that compels and lulls. . . . Something of Disraeli—a high, patrician, Solomon-like judgment and philosophic power, with wit, poetry and music. Not to be first in any fashion, but will outlive them all, like the great ones.

• MAY 31, 1958. No such thing as present sight. Hindsight and foresight.

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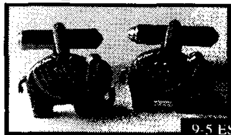

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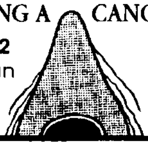

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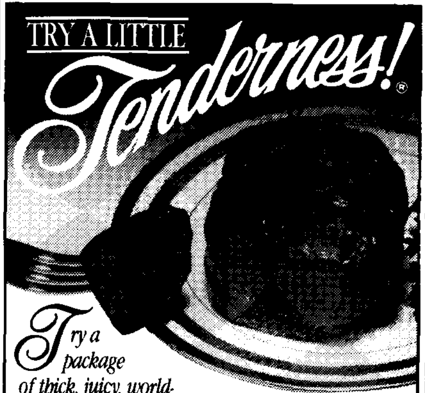
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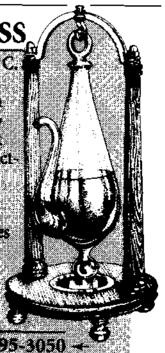
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• NOVEMBER 21, 1958. Moved to Madison Square Hotel—Room 1043. $42 a week. See river at each end of window (bay).

• JUNE 28, 1959. Listened to re-run TV of "Open End"—the David Susskind panel—with Dorothy Parker, Truman Capote, and Norman Mailer pontificating on writing . . . sounding like three armchair mountain climbers at the foot of Olympus, trying to describe the view from the summit. A good word for the Titans, a pat for the Classics, a shy admission that there are only 15 really good writers in the United States (who are the other 12?).

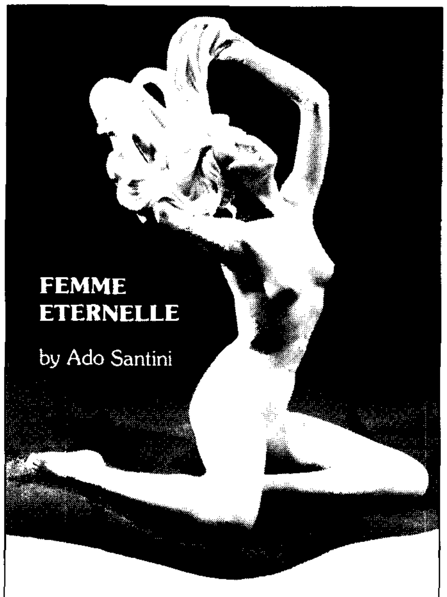
Writers are usually embarrassed when other writers start to "sing"—their profession's prestige is at stake and the blabbermouths are likely to have the whole wretched truth beat out of them, that they are an ignorant, hysterically egotistical, shamelessly toadying, envious lot who would do almost anything in the world—even write a novel—to avoid an honest day's work or escape a human responsibility. Any writer tempted to open his trap in public lets the news out.

• NOVEMBER 29, 1959. To Russia and Bill Hughes's for triple birthday with charming young Neill, age five, who said "I *feel* like ten" rather wearily. Babies all over.

After the polenta and birthday cake I went into the bedroom where a dim nightlight showed up an earnest little boy in bed drawing, Neill. "Do you know what time it is," he said. "Ten," I said. "No, it is ten minutes *after* ten," he said gravely, still absorbed in drawing.

I started out and he called softly "Dawn!" I went over to him and he pulled my head down and said with great awe "Dawn, I draw so good! I draw *so good!* You see that switch over there?" I did and turned it on and he said "See, I have drawn it with the two screws on it and the place to turn it on and I'm going to draw all around that open place there." He was awed and blissful about this great gift he found in himself—a moment that happens only once or twice in an artist's life.

• MARCH 8, 1962. Someone asked me about the long marriage to Joe—42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years—and I reflected that he was the only person in the world I found it always a kick to run into on the street.

As for his death, this is a curious thing to say but after 42 years of life together—much of it precarious and crushing—we have been through worse disasters together, and I'm sure Joe would feel the same way about me.

• APRIL 22, 1962. Riverside Drive lovely and pink and melancholy as Youth for it represents my youth. Youth is nothing but sadness and frustration and longing by itself but it flies on a *dream* of glamour.

• JULY 31, 1962. Reading Leicester Hemingway's story of Ernest. Fact is, no first rate genius was ever a family man and no reason for family to think they understood him or knew him just because he was obliged to board with them for 18 or 20 years. They are proud, jealous, and bewildered when the world finds a swan—didn't Sister get better grades in Geography? wasn't Ethel a prize debater? wasn't Phil a leading man in the high school play? Where did this swan get his genius?

• JANUARY 12, 1963. Viking tells me reviews picking up all over country, due to *New Yorker* Wilson piece probably. Also "Spur" ["The Golden Spur"] is on final list of National Book Award. And Mrs. Vincent Astor loves book and wants me for cocktails. Why? Does she think we writers should band together?

• MARCH 8, 1963. Girl said to me "Have I ever read any of your books?" I said "You look as if you had." She took this as insult—I assured her author-ego made it a compliment.

Was told yesterday I had not won the National Book Award. I felt some relief as I have no equipment for prize-winning—no small talk, no time for idle graciousness and required public show, no clothes either or desire for front. I realize I have no yen for any experience (even a triumph) that blocks observation, when I am the observed instead of the observer. Time is too short to miss so many sights. ♦

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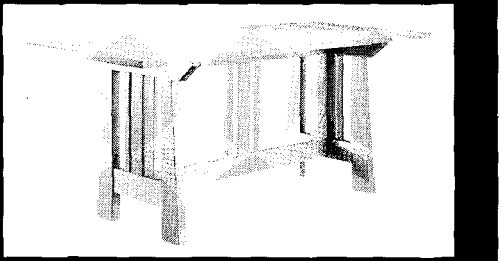

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FICTION

THE ULTIMATUM

BY PHILIP ROTH

EITHER forswear fucking others or the affair is over.

This was the ultimatum, the maddeningly improbable, wholly unforeseen ultimatum, that the mistress of fifty-two delivered in tears to her lover of sixty-four on the anniversary of an attachment that had persisted with an amazing licentiousness—and that, no less amazingly, had stayed their secret—for thirteen years. But now with hormonal infusions ebbing, with the prostate enlarging, with probably no more than another few years of semi-dependable potency still his—with perhaps not that much more life remaining—here at the approach of the end of everything, he was being charged, on pain of losing her, to turn himself inside out.

She was Drenka Balich, the innkeeper's popular partner in business and marriage, esteemed for the attention she showered on all her guests, for her warmhearted, mothering tenderness not only with visiting children and the old folks but with the local girls who cleaned the rooms and served the meals, and he was the forgotten puppeteer Mickey Sabbath, a short, heavyset, white-bearded man with unnerving green eyes and painfully arthritic fingers who, had he said yes to Jim Henson some thirty years earlier, before "Sesame Street" started up, when Henson had taken him to lunch on the Upper East Side and asked him to join his clique of four or five people, could have been inside Big Bird all these years. Instead of Caroll Spinney, it would have been Sabbath who was the fellow inside Big Bird, Sabbath who had got himself a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Sabbath who had been to China with Bob Hope—or so his wife, Roseanna, delighted in reminding him back when she was still drinking herself to death for her two unchallengeable reasons: because of all that had not happened and because of all that had. But as Sabbath wouldn't have been any happier inside Big Bird than he was inside Roseanna, he was not much bruised by the heckling. In 1989, when Sabbath had been publicly disgraced for the gross sexual harassment of a girl forty years his junior, Roseanna had had to be interned for a month in a psychiatric institution because of the alcoholic breakdown brought on by the humiliation of the scandal.

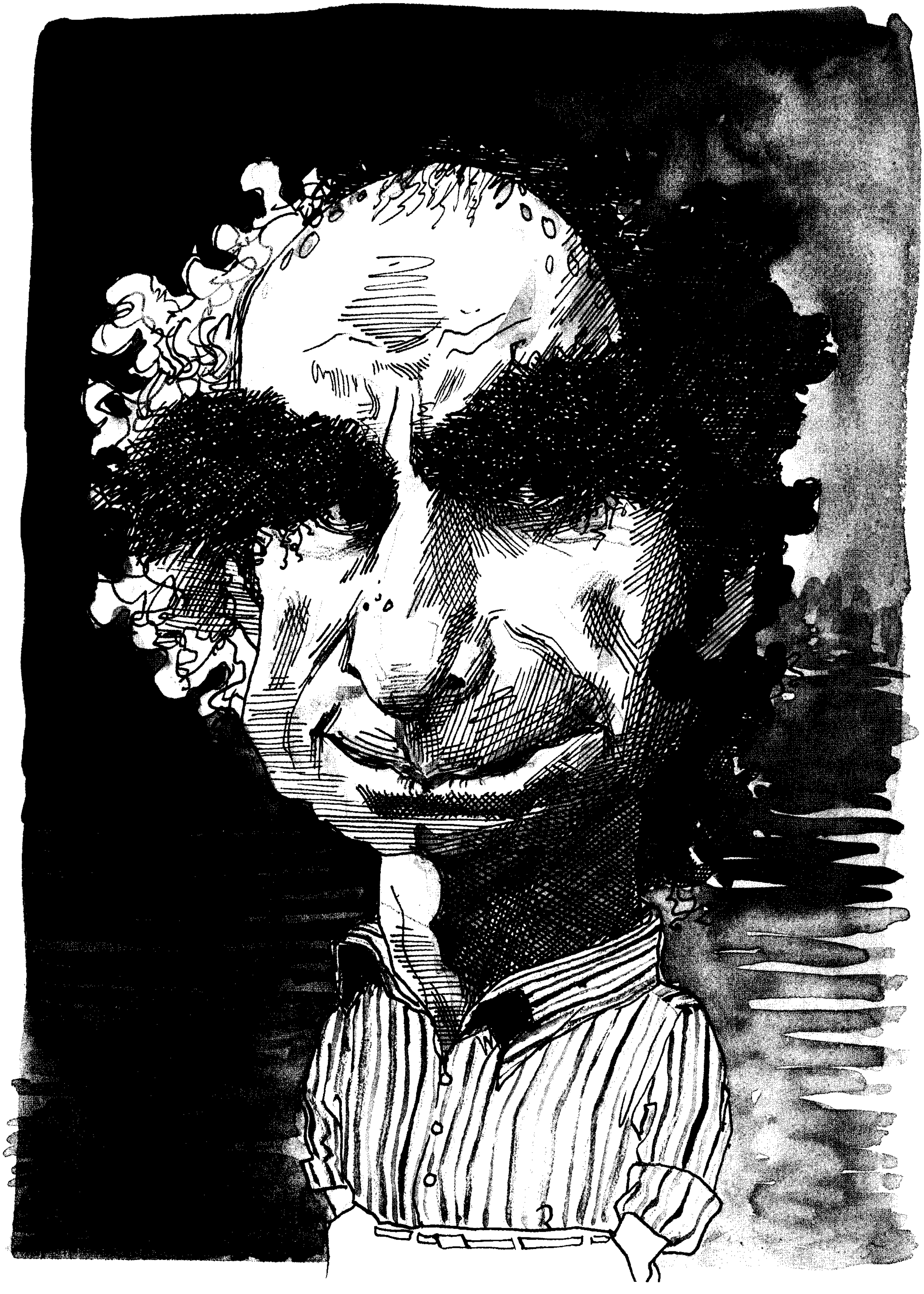
"One monogamous mate isn't enough for you?" he asked Drenka. "You like monogamy so much with him you want it with me, too? Is there no connection you can see between your husband's enviable fidelity and the fact that he physically repels you?" Pompously he continued, "We who have never stopped exciting each other impose on each other no vows, no oaths, no restrictions, whereas with him the fucking is sickening even for the two minutes a month he bends you over the dinner table and does it from behind. And why is that? Matija is big, powerful, virile, a head of black hair like a porcupine. His hairs are *quills.* Every old dame in the county is in love with him, and not just for his Slavic charm. His looks turn them on. Your little waitresses are all nuts about the cleft in his chin. I've watched him back in the kitchen when it's a hundred degrees in August and they're waiting ten deep on the terrace for tables. I've seen him churning out the dinners, grilling those kebabs in his sopping T-shirt. All agleam with grease, he turns *me* on. Only his wife he repels. Why? The ostentatiously monogamous nature, that is why."

Drenka dragged herself mournfully beside him, up the steep wooded hillside to the heights where their bathing brook bubbled forth, clear water rippling down a staircase of granite boulders brokenly spiralling between the storm-slanted, silvery-green birches that overhung the banks. During the early months of the affair, on a solitary hiking expedition in search of just such a love nest, she had discovered, within a clump of ancient fir trees not far from the brook, three boulders, each the size and the shade of a small elephant, that enclosed the triangular clearing they would have instead of a home. Because of mud, snow, or drunken hunters out shooting up the woods, the crest of the hill was not accessible in all seasons, but from May through early October, except when it rained, it was here they retreated to renovate their lives. Years back, a helicopter had once appeared out of nowhere to hover momentarily a hundred feet overhead while they were naked on the tarpaulin below, but otherwise, though the Grotto, as they'd come to call the hideaway, was fifteen minutes by foot from the only paved road connecting Madamaska Falls to the valley, no human presence had ever threatened their secret encampment.

DRENKA was a dark, Italian-looking Croat from the Dalmatian coast, on the short side like Sabbath, a full, firmly made woman at the provocative edge of being just overweight, her shape, at her heaviest, reminiscent of those clay figurines molded circa 2000 B.C., fat little dolls with big breasts and big thighs unearthed all the way from Europe down to Asia Minor and worshipped under a dozen different names as the great mother of the gods. She was pretty in a rather efficient, businesslike way, except for her nose, a surprisingly bridgeless prizefighter's nose that created a sort of blur at the heart of her face, a nose slightly out of plumb with the full mouth and the large dark eyes, and the telltale sign, as Sabbath came to view it, of everything malleable and indeterminate in her seemingly well-deployed nature. She looked as though she had once been mauled, in earliest childhood damaged by a crushing blow, when in fact she was the daughter of kindly parents, both of them high-school teachers religiously devoted to the tyrannical platitudes of Tito's Communist Party. Their only child, she had been abundantly loved by these nice, dreary people.

The blow in the family had been delivered by Drenka. At twenty-two, an assistant bookkeeper with the national railway, she married Matija Balić, a

DAVID LEVINE



handsome young waiter with aspirations whom she had met when she went for her vacation to the hotel that belonged to the railroad-syndicate workers on the island of Brač, just off Split. The two went to Trieste for their honeymoon and never returned home. They ran away not merely to become rich in the West but because Matija's grandfather had been imprisoned in 1948, when Tito broke with the Soviet Union and the grandfather, a local Party bureaucrat, a Communist since 1923 and an idealist about big Mother Russia, had dared to discuss the matter openly.

MY SON THE MAN

Suddenly his shoulders get a lot wider,
the way Houdini would expand his body
while people were putting him in chains. It seems
no time since I would help him to put on his sleeper,
guide his calves into the gold interior,
zip him up and toss him up and
catch his weight. I cannot imagine him
no longer a child, and I know I must get ready,
get over my fear of men now my son
is going to be one. This was not
what I had in mind when he pressed up through me like a
sealed trunk through the ice of the Hudson,
snapped the padlock, unsnaked the chains,
and appeared in my arms, what I had always wanted,
my son the baby. Now he looks at me
the way Houdini studied a box
to learn the way out, then smiled and let himself be manacled.

—Sharon Olds

"My both parents," Drenka had explained to Sabbath, "were convinced Communists, and they loved Comrade Tito, who is there with his smile like a smiling monster, and so I figured out early how to love Tito more than any other child in Yugoslavia. We were all Pioneers, little boys and girls who would go out and sing wearing a red scarf. We would sing songs about Tito and how he is this flower, this violet flower, and how all the youth loves him. But with Matija it was different. He was a little boy who *loved his grandfather. And somebody* told on his grandfather—is that the word? Reported. He was reported. As an enemy of the regime. And the enemies of the regime were all sent to this horrible prison. It was the most horrible time when they were like cattle thrown into the ships. Taken by ships from the mainland to the island. And who survives survives and who doesn't doesn't. It was a place where the stone was the only element. All they had to do, they had to work those stones, cut them, without a reason. Many families had someone who went to this Goli Otok that means Naked Island. People report on others for whatever reason—to advance, for hatred, for whatever. There was a big threat always hanging in the air about being proper, and proper is to support the regime. On this island they didn't feed them, they didn't give them water even. An island just off the coast, a little bit north of Split—from the coast you can see the island in the distance. His grandfather got hepatitis there, and he died just before Matija graduated from high school."

Drenka shamed her parents by fleeing to this imperialist country, broke their hearts, and they, too, died, both of cancer, not long after her defection. However, she so loved money and so loved "fun" that she probably had the tender attentions of these convinced Com*munists to thank for whatever impeded* the full, youthful body with the tantalizingly thuggish face from doing with itself something even more capricious than becoming enslaved to capitalism.

The only man she would ever admit to having charged for the night was the puppeteer Sabbath, and over the thirteen years this had occurred only once, when he had presented the offering of Christa, the runaway German au pair working at the gourmet food shop, whom he had scouted and patiently recruited for their joint delectation. "Cash," Drenka had informed him, though for months now, ever since Sabbath had first come upon Christa hitchhiking into town, Drenka had anticipated the adventure with no less excitement than Sabbath and needed no urging to conspire. "Crisp bills," she said, prankishly narrowing her eyes but meaning it all the same. "Stiff and new." Adapting without hesitation to the role she'd so swiftly devised for him, he asked, "How many?" Tartly she answered, "Ten." "Can't afford ten." "Forget it then. Leave me out." "You're a hard woman." "Yes. Hard," she replied with relish. "I have a sense of my worth." "It's taken some doing to arrange this, you know. It's not been a snap setting this up. Christa may be a wayward child but she still requires a lot of attention. It's I who ought to be paid by you." "I *don't want to be treated like a fake* whore. I want to be treated like a real whore. A thousand dollars or I stay home." "You're asking the impossible." "Never mind then." "Five hundred." "Seven fifty." "Five hundred. The best I can do." "Then I must be paid before we get there. I want to walk in with the money in my purse, knowing that I've got a job to do. I want to feel like a real whore." "I doubt," suggested Sabbath, "that, to feel like a real whore, money alone will suffice." "It will for me." "Lucky you." "Lucky *you*," said Drenka defiantly—"O.K., five hundred. But before. I have to have all of it the night before."

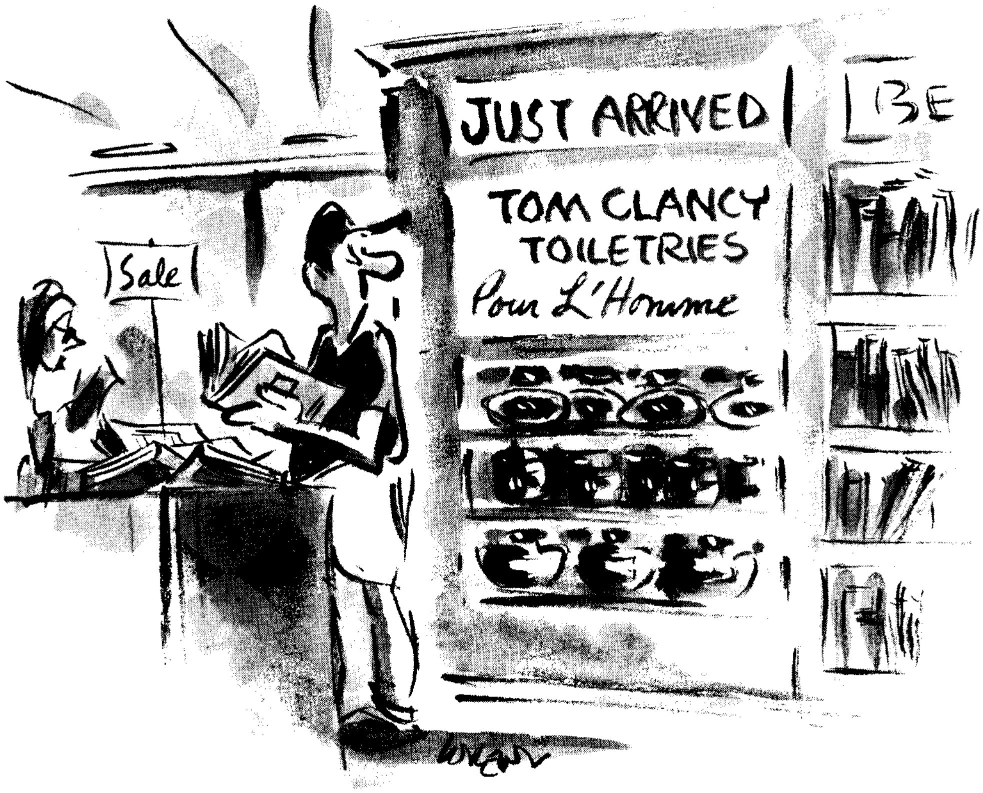
The terms of the deal were negotiated while they manipulated each other manually on the tarpaulin up at the Grotto.

Now, Sabbath had no interest in money. But since arthritis had finished him off as a performing puppeteer at the international festivals, and his Puppet Workshop was no longer welcome in the curriculum of the four-college program because of his unmasking there as a degenerate, he was dependent for support on his wife, with the result that it was not painless for him to peel off five of the two hundred and twenty hundreddollar bills earned annually by Roseanna at the regional high school and hand them over to a woman whose family-run inn netted a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year.

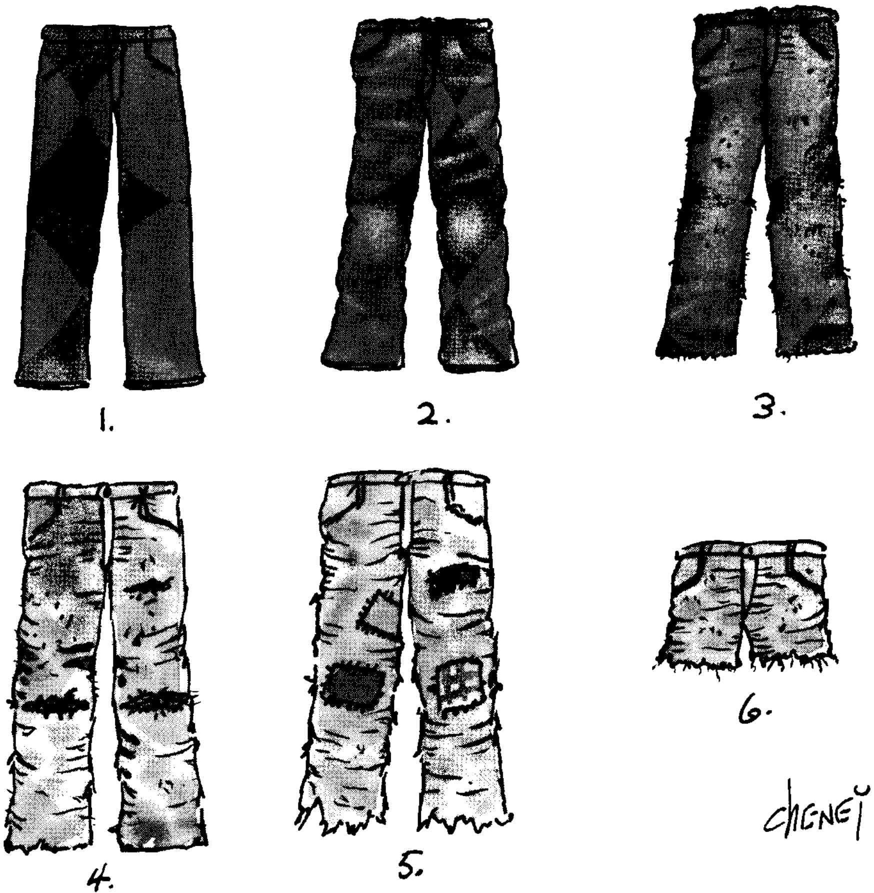
He could have told her to fuck off, of course, especially as Drenka would have participated as ardently in the threesome without the money as with, but to agree for a night to act as her john seemed to do as much for him as it did for her to pretend to be his prostitute. Sabbath, moreover, had no right *not* to yield—her licentious abandon owed its full flowering to him. Her systematic efficiency as hostess-manager of the inn—just the sheer pleasure, year after year, of banking all that dough—might long ago have mummified her lower life had not Sabbath suspected from the flatness of the nose, from the roundness of the limbs—from nothing more than that to begin with—that Drenka Balich's perfectionism on the job was not her only immoderate inclination. It was Sabbath who, a step at a time, the most patient of instructors, had assisted her in becoming estranged from her orderly life and in discovering the indecency to supplement the deficiencies of her regular diet.

INDECENCY? Who knows? Do as you like, Sabbath said, and she did and liked it and liked telling him about how much she had liked it no less than he liked hearing about it. Husbands, after weekending at the inn with their wives and children, phoned Drenka secretly from their offices to tell her they had to see her. The excavator, the carpenter, the electrician, the painter, all the laborers assisting around the inn invariably maneuvered to eat their lunches close to the office where she did the bookkeeping. Men wherever she went sensed the intangible aura of invitation. Once Sabbath had sanctioned for her the force that wants more and more—a force to whose urging she was never wholly averse even before Sabbath had come along—men began to understand that this shortish, less than startling-looking middle-aged woman corseted by all her smiling courtesy was powered by a carnality much like their own. Inside this woman was someone who thought like a man. And the man she thought like was Sabbath. She was, as she put it, his "sidekicker."

How could he, in good conscience, say no to the five hundred bucks? No was not a part of the deal. To be what she had learned to want to be (to be what he needed her to be), what she needed from Sabbath was yes. Never mind that she used the money to buy power tools for her son's basement workshop. Matthew was married and a state trooper with the barracks down in the valley; Drenka adored him and, once he became a cop, worried about him all the time. He was not big and handsome with porcupinish black hair and a deep cleft in his chin like the father whose Anglicized name he bore but much more patently Drenka's offspring, short in stature—only five feet eight and a hundred and thirty-five pounds, he'd been the smallest guy in his class at the police academy as well as the youngest—and at the center of his face a bit of a blur, the noseless nose a replica of hers. He had been groomed to one day be proprietor of the inn and had left his father desolated by quitting hotel-management school after just a year to become a muscular, crew-cut trooper with the big hat, the badge, and lots of power, the kid cop whose first assignment—running radar with the traffic squad, driving the chase car up and down the main highways—was the greatest job in the world. You meet so many people, every car you stop is different, a different person, different circumstances, a different speed. . . . Drenka repeated to Sabbath everything Matthew told her about life as a trooper, from the day he had entered the academy seven years earlier and the instructors there began to yell at them and he swore to his mother, "I'm not going to let this beat me," until the day he graduated and, little as he was, they awarded him an excellence pin in physical fitness and told him and the classmates who had survived the twenty-four-week course, "You're not God but you're the next closest thing to him." She described to Sabbath the virtues of Matthew's fifteen-shot 9-mm. pistol and how he carried it in his boot or at the back in his belt when he was off duty and how that terrified her. She was constantly afraid that he was going to be killed, especially when he was transferred from the traffic squad to the barracks and had to work the midnight shift every few weeks. Matthew himself came to love cruising in his car as much as he'd loved running radar. "Once you're gone on



your shift, you're your own boss out there. Once you get into that car, you can do what you want out there. Freedom, Ma. Lots of freedom. Unless something happens, all you do is ride. Alone in the car, cruising, just driving the roads until they call you for something." He'd grown up in what the state police called the North Patrol. Knew the area, all the roads, the woods, knew the businesses in the towns and found an enormous manly satisfaction in driving by at night and checking them out, checking out the banks, checking out the bars, watching the people leaving the bars to see how bad off they were. Matthew had a front seat, he told his mother, at the greatest show on earth—accidents, burglaries, domestic disputes, suicides. Most people never see a suicide victim, but a girl whom Matthew had gone to school with had blown her head off in the woods, sat under an oak tree and blew out her brains, and Matthew, in his first year out of the academy, was the cop on the scene to call the medical examiner and wait for him to come. In that first year, Matthew told his mother, he was so pumped up, felt so invincible, he believed he could stop bullets with his teeth. Matthew walks in on a domestic dispute where both of the people are drunk and screaming at each other and hating each other and throwing punches and he, her son, talks to them and calms them down so that by the time he leaves everything is O.K. and neither of them has to be pinched for breach of peace. And sometimes they're so bad he does pinch 'em, handcuffs the woman and handcuffs the man, and then waits for another trooper to come, and they take the couple in before they kill each other. When a kid was showing a gun in a pizza place on 63, flashing it around before leaving, it was Matthew who found the car the kid was driving and, without any backup, knowing the kid had a gun, told him over the loudspeaker to come out with his hands in the air and had his own gun drawn right on the guy . . . and these stories, establishing for his mother that Matthew was a good cop who wanted to do a good job, to do it as he'd been taught to do it, frightened her so that she bought a scanner, a little box with an antenna and a crystal that monitored the police signals on Matthew's frequency, and sometimes when he was on the midnight shift and she couldn't sleep, she would turn on the scanner and listen to it all night long. The scanner would pick up the signal every time Matthew was called, so that Drenka knew more or less where he was and where he was going and that he was still alive. When she heard his number—415B—boom, she was awake.



THE JEANS OF DORIAN GRAY

But so was Matthew's father—and enraged to be reminded yet again that the son he had been training every summer in the kitchen, the heir to the business he had built from nothing as a penniless immigrant, was now an expert in karate and judo instead, out at three in the morning stupidly trailing an old pickup truck that was going suspiciously slowly crossing Battle Mountain. The bitterness between father and son had grown so bad that it was only with Sabbath that Drenka could share her fears about Matthew's safety and recount her pride in the amount of motor-vehicle activity he was able to produce in a week: "It's out there," Matthew told her. "There's always something—speeding, stop signs, tail-lights out, all kind of violations." To Sabbath, then, it came as no surprise when Drenka admitted that with the five hundred dollars he had paid her to complete the trio with Christa and himself she had bought, for Matthew's birthday, a portable Makita table saw and a nice set of dado blades.

All in all, things couldn't have worked out better for everyone. Drenka had found the means by which to be her husband's dearest friend. The onetime puppet master of the Indecent Theater of Manhattan made more than merely tolerable for her the routines of marriage that previously had almost killed her—now she cherished those deadly routines for the counterweight they provided her recklessness. Far from seething with disgust for her unimaginative husband, she had never been more appreciative of Matija's stolidity.

Five hundred was *cheap* for all that everyone was getting in the way of solace and satisfaction, and so, however much it disturbed him to fork over those stiff, new banknotes, Sabbath displayed toward Drenka the same sangfroid that she affected as, lightly enjoying the movie cliché, she folded the bills in half and deposited them into her bra, down between the breasts whose soft fullness had never ceased to captivate him. It was supposed to be otherwise, with the musculature everywhere losing its firmness, but even where her skin had gone papery at the low point of her neckline, even that palm-size diamond of minutely crosshatched flesh intensified not merely her enduring allure but his tender feeling for her as well. He was now six short years from seventy: what had him grasping at the broadening buttocks as though the tattooist Time had ornamented neither of them with its comical festoonery was his knowing inescapably that the game was just about over.

W.M. Hamilton

"God, I'll be glad when his genius grant runs out."

• •

LATELY, when Sabbath suckled at Drenka's uberous breasts—"uberous," the root word of "exuberant," which is itself *ex* plus *uberare,* to be fruitful, to overflow like Venus lying prone in Tintoretto's painting where the Milky Way is coming out of her tit—suckled with an unrelenting frenzy that caused Drenka to roll her head ecstatically back and to groan (as Venus herself may have once groaned), "I feel it deep down in my cunt," he was pierced by the sharpest of longings for his late little mother. Her primacy was nearly as absolute as it had been in their first incomparable decade together. Sabbath felt something close to veneration for that natural sense of a destiny she'd enjoyed and, too—in a woman with as physical a life as a horse's—for the soul embedded in all that vibrating energy, a soul as unmistakably present as the odorous cakes baking in the oven after school. Emotions were stirred up in him that he had not felt since he was eight and nine years old and she had found the delight of delights in mothering her two boys. Yes, it had been the apex of her life, raising Morty and Mickey. How her memory, her *meaning,* expanded in Sabbath when he recalled the alacrity with which she had prepared each spring for Passover, all the work of packing away the year-round dishes, two sets of them, and then lugging, in their cartons, from the garage, the glass Passover dishes, washing them, shelving them—in less than a day, between the time he and Morty left for school in the morning and they returned in midafternoon, she'd emptied the pantry of *chumitz* and cleansed and scoured the kitchen in accordance with every last holiday prescription. Hard to determine from the way she tackled her tasks whether it was she who was serving necessity or necessity that was serving her. A slight woman with a large nose and curly dark hair, she hopped and darted to and fro like a bird in a berry bush, trilling and twittering a series of notes as liquidly bright as a cardinal's song, a tune she exuded no less naturally than she dusted, ironed, mended, polished, and sewed. Folding things, straightening things, arranging things, stacking things, packing things, sorting things, opening things, separating things, bundling things—her agile fingers never stopped nor did the whistling ever cease, all throughout his childhood. That was how content she was, immersed in everything that had to be done to keep her husband's accounts in order, to live peaceably alongside her elderly mother-in-law, to manage the daily needs of the two boys, to see to it, during even the worst of the Depression, that however little money the butter-and-egg business yielded, the budget she devised did not impinge on their happy development and that, for instance, everything handed down from Morty to Mickey, which was nearly everything Mickey wore, was impeccably patched, freshly aired, spotlessly clean. Her husband proudly proclaimed to his customers that his wife had eyes in the back of her head and two pairs of hands.

Then Morty went off to the war and it all changed. Always they had done everything as a family. They had never been separated. They were never so poor that they would rent out the house in the summer and, like half the neighbors living as close to the beach as the Sabbaths did, move in back to a shitty little apartment over the garage, but they were still a poor family by American standards and none of them had ever gone anywhere. But then Morty was gone and for the first time in his life Mickey slept alone in their room. Once, they went up to see Morty when he was training in Oswego, New York. For six months, he trained in Atlantic City and they drove to see him there on Sundays. And when he was in pilot school in North Carolina, they took the drive all the way down South, even though his father had to turn the truck over to a neighbor he paid to run deliveries the days they were gone. Morty had bad skin and wasn't particularly handsome, he wasn't great in school—a B-C student in everything but shop and gym—he had never had much success with girls, and yet everybody knew that with his physical strength and his strong character he would be able to take care of himself, whatever difficulties life presented. He played clarinet in a dance band in high school. He was a track star. A terrific swimmer. He helped his father with the business. He helped his mother in the house. He was great with his hands, but then, they all were: the delicacy of his powerful father candling the eggs, the fastidious dexterity of his mother ordering the house—the Sabbath digital artfulness that Mickey, too, would one day exhibit to the world. All their freedom was in their hands. Morty could repair plumbing, electrical appliances, anything. Give it to Morty, his mother used to say, Morty'll fix it. And she did not exaggerate when she said that he was the kindest older brother in the world. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps at eighteen, a kid just out of Asbury High, rather than wait to be drafted. He went in at eighteen and he was dead at twenty. Shot down over the Philippines December 12, 1944.

For nearly a year, Sabbath's mother wouldn't get out of bed. Couldn't. Never again was she spoken of as a woman with eyes in the back of her head. She acted at times as though she didn't even have eyes in the front of her head, and, as far as the surviving son could still recall while panting and gulping as though to drain Drenka dry, she was never again heard to whistle her signature song. Now the seaside cottage was silent when he walked up the sandy alleyway after school, and he could not tell till he got inside if she was even in the house. No honey cake, no date-and-nut bread, no cupcakes, nothing ever again baking in the oven after school. When the weather turned nice, she sat on the boardwalk bench overlooking the beach to which she used to rush out with the boys at dawn to buy flounder off the fishing boats at half what it cost in the store. After the war, when everybody came home, she went there to talk to Mort. As the decades passed, she talked to him more rather than less, until in the nursing home in Long Branch where Sabbath had to put her at ninety she talked to Morty alone. She had no idea who Sabbath was when he drove the four and a half hours to visit her during the last two years of her life. The living son she ceased to recognize. But that had begun as long ago as 1944.

And now Sabbath talked to *her.* And this he had not expected. To his father, who had never deserted Mickey however much Morty's death had broken him, too, who primitively stood by Mickey no matter how incomprehensible to him his boy's life became when he went to sea after high school or began to perform with puppets on the streets of New York, to his late father, a simple, uneducated man who unlike his wife had been born on the other side and had come to America all on his own at thirteen and who within seven years had earned enough money to send for his parents and his two younger brothers, Sabbath had never uttered a word since the retired butter-and-egg man died in his sleep, at the age of eighty-one, fourteen years earlier. Never had he felt the shadow of his father's presence hovering nearby. This was not only because his father had always been the least talkative one in the family but because no evidence had ever been offered to persuade Sabbath that the dead were anything other than dead. To talk to them, admittedly, was to indulge in the most defensible of irrational human activities, but to Sabbath it was alien just the same. Sabbath was a realist, ferociously a realist, so that by sixty-four he had all but given up on making contact with the living, let alone discussing his problems with the dead.

Yet precisely this he now did daily. His mother was there every day and he was talking to her and she was communing with him. Exactly how present *are* you, Ma? Are you only here or are you everywhere? Would you look like yourself if I had the means to see you? The picture I have keeps shifting. Do you know only what you knew when you were living, or do you now know everything, or is "knowing" no longer an issue? What's the story? Are you still so miserably sad? That would be the best news of all—that you are your whistling old self again because Morty's with you. Is he? Is Dad? And if there's you three, why not God, too? Or is an incorporeal existence just like everything else, in the nature of things, and God no more necessary there than he is here? Or don't you inquire any further about being dead than you did about being alive? Is being dead just something you do the way you ran the house?

Eerie, incomprehensible, ridiculous, the visitation was nonetheless real: no matter how he explained it to himself he could not make his mother go away. He knew she was there in the same way he knew when he was in the sun or in the shade. There was something too natural about his perceiving her for the perception to evaporate before his mocking resistance. She didn't just show up when he was in despair, it didn't happen only in the middle of the night when he awoke in dire need of a substitute for everything disappearing—his mother was up in the woods, up at the Grotto with him and Drenka, hovering above their half-clad bodies like that helicopter. Maybe the helicopter had *been* his mother. His dead mother was with him, watching him, everywhere encircling him. His mother had been loosed on him. She had returned to take him to his death.

FUCK others and the affair is over.

He asked her why.

"Because I want you to be faithful."

"That won't do."

"Won't it?" said Drenka tearfully. "It would if you loved me."

"Yes, love is slavery?"

"You are the man of my life! Not Matija—you! Either I am your woman, your *only* woman, or this all *has* to be over!"

It was the week before Memorial Day, a luminous May afternoon, and up in the woods a high wind was blowing sprigs of new leaves off the great trees and the sweet scent of everything flowering and sprouting and shooting up reminded him of Sciarappa's Barber Shop, in Bradley, where Morty had taken him for his haircuts when he was a small kid and where they brought their clothes to be fixed by Sciarappa's wife. Nothing was merely itself any longer; it all reminded him of something long gone or of everything that was going. Mentally he addressed his mother. "Smell the smells, can you? Does the out-of-doors register in any way? Is being dead even worse than heading there? Or is it Mrs. Balich that's the awfulness? Or don't the trivialities bother you now one way or the other?"

Either he was sitting in his dead mother's lap or she was sitting in his. Perhaps she was snaking in through his nose along with the scent of the mountain in bloom, wafting through him as oxygen. Encircling him and embodied within him.

"And just when did you decide this? What has happened to bring this on? You are not yourself, Drenka."

"I am. *This is myself.* Tell me you will be faithful to me. Please tell me that that's what you will do!"

"First tell me why."

"I'm *suffering*."

She was. He'd seen her suffer and this was what it looked like. The blurriness broadened out from the middle of her face rather like an eraser crossing a blackboard and leaving in its wake a wide streak of negated meaning. You didn't see a face any longer but a bowl of stupefaction. Whenever the rift between her husband and their son erupted in a screaming fight, she invariably wound up looking just this awful when she ran to Sabbath, numb and incoherent with fear, her sprightly cunning having evaporated before their improbable capacity for rage and its vile rhetoric. Sabbath assured her—largely without conviction—that they would not kill each other. But more than once he had himself contemplated with a shudder what might be roiling away beneath the lid of the relentlessly genial good manners that made the Balich men so impenetrably dull. Why *had* the boy become a cop? Why did he want to be out risking his life looking for criminals with a revolver and handcuffs and a lethal little club when there was a small fortune to be made pleasing the happy guests at the inn? And, after seven years, why couldn't the amiable father forgive him? Why did he wind up charging his son with wrecking his life every single time they met? Granted that each had his own hidden reality, that like everyone else they were not without duality; granted that they were not entirely rational people and that they lacked wit or irony of any kind—nonetheless, where *was* the bottom in these Matthews? Sabbath privately conceded that Drenka had good reason to be as agitated as she was by the tremendous force of their antagonism (especially as one of them was armed), but since she was never remotely their target, he advised her neither to take a side nor to intercede—in time the heat would have to die down, et cetera, et cetera. And eventually, when her terror had begun to lift and

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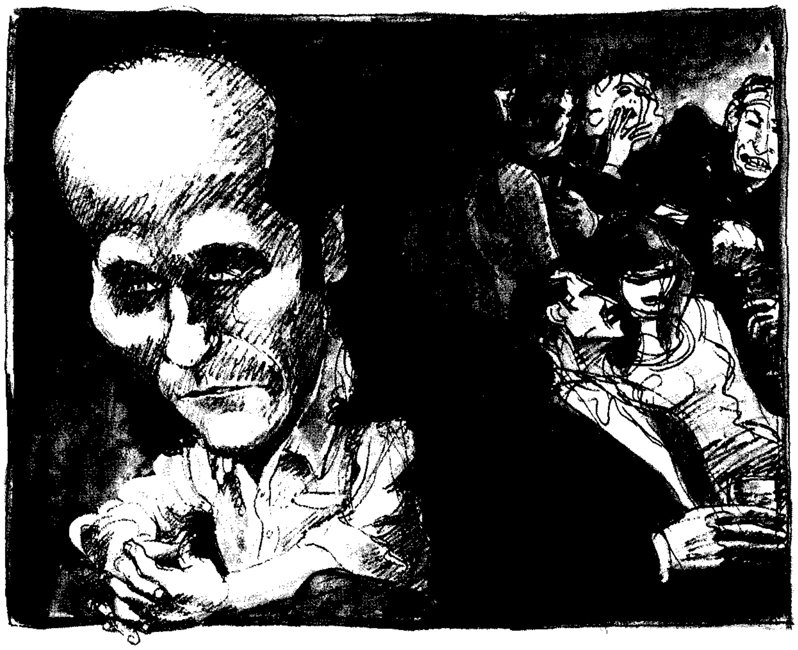
JOURNALS

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Sketches, scenes, and workbook entries by the author of "Independence Day."

BY RICHARD FORD



"A willingness to see everything as capable of being different from how it was."

EDWARD SOREL

SPRING, 1989, GREAT FALLS, MONTANA. I was riding down the interstate with J, in his Beamer. He called it that. It was about 2:15 A.M. We were going about a hundred and fifteen. We were both drunk. We'd been to the Poor Man's Bar, in Vaughn, shot pool till it closed. There were also some other things. The whole evening had started because J wanted to go to Monte Carlo Night at the Elks, and had asked me, then got bored in a hurry. That was an experience. For casino night, the Elks hire waitresses from the other bars and restaurants in town and pay them to serve cocktails topless.

Anyway, J said, "I'm very drunk. Why don't you drive?"

"I've never driven your car before," I said. He was very proud of his car, though later he had to sell it.

"O.K., you've said that now," he said. "But it's just like any other car."

"I'm drunk, too," I said.

"That doesn't matter. But you have to promise to drive a hundred and fifteen. I want to line us up some snort so we can be happy men."

He always had drugs. I don't know where from. I always thought about him that if I ever wanted anybody killed I could ask him and he would do it.

He ran a little tailoring business in town but wanted to get into the theatrical agenting business, though no one needed a theatrical agent in Great Falls. He was actually my wife's friend more than he was mine. She picked up guys like him. Crazy fucks. They were loyal to her and tolerated me because she liked me. I remember later I saw him and he had an all-bald head. "A dick with ears," his wife said about him. He was, I think, of Basque descent.

Anyway, "you're crazy," I said.

"I am crazy," J said. "And guess what?"

"I can't," I said.

"Guess what today is."

I didn't know if he meant yesterday or the day that would be dawning in a couple of hours. "I don't know," I said.

"It's Hitler's birthday. We ought to just keep on driving and go all the way to Hayden Lake and get in on the festivities."

"Well, that's crazy, too," I said.

"Yeah, but he wasn't all that bad," J said. "He got a lot of bad press."

"He did do that."

"Would you like to buy this car?" he said.

"Why?" I said.

"Because I need ten thousand bucks by tomorrow, that's why."

"It's worth that," I said.

"Goddamn right, it is. It's worth more than that. Me and the old lady are taking a trip. So I need some money."

He drove us back to the Elks, where Monte Carlo Night was still going on. The girls with no tops were almost gone home. Just one or two were left who probably had nothing to do and might go home with an Elk.

- FALL, 1989, DUTTON, MONTANA. She just liked saying things, to try them out on you, see what you'd do, see how it made her feel, see what happened next:

"I'm voting Communist next time."

"When the kids were young sometimes I'd have to put them in the oven to keep them warm."

"I think I'll go to medical school."

"Reading can't help you. It's a waste of time."

"I've decided to go live in Holland."

Like that.

- FALL, 1989, NEW ORLEANS. When K and I went to Barbizon, we had to walk around the streets one morning for two hours, trying to stay awake while they got our room ready. Typical. But I remember we watched two French girls walking down a walled, tree-lined street, going to school. They were just talking to each other as they walked. I told K at the time I couldn't remember ever doing that—walking along when I was a kid, talking to some other kid. I couldn't imagine what I might've known to talk about. It just seemed impossible to have done that.

- NOVEMBER 3, 1991, DUTTON. A blind man walks past my house every day, usually just at dusk. His wife is sometimes with him, leading him. He's a young man—in his thirties—and uses a cane, but I guess because she's with him so much he doesn't look lost the way other blind people do who're alone. He usually sings out, often to me in the yard when I don't think he knows I'm there: "Hi, how ya doin'?" "I heard that." "I may be blind but I'm not deaf. Or dumb." It's as if he's involved with everything he passes. Sometimes he comes with his cane and no wife, but pulling a child in a child's metal wagon, then comes back after while with the child still in the wagon but also with sacks of groceries. The story I heard about him is that he was perfectly sighted, ran a cow-calf operation, then got sick and went blind from it. Everything changed.

- JULY 9, 1994, NEW ORLEANS. A cool summer day all day. It rained in the morning, then at noon, and then again sometime after three. No chance to get hot. So we bought a watermelon and ate it late at night after a movie, sitting in the dark outside. "You eat yours so much faster than I eat mine," K said. "It's because I eat the seeds," I said. "I see," she said.

I remembered a story from Mississippi in the fifties. Old people lived in our neighborhood in Jackson. A lot of elderly women—widows—living alone in big houses they once occupied with their husbands. When these old ladies got a watermelon they never ate it all, never ate it down to the rind. So when they threw it out, put it in sacks in the garbage and set it out on Congress Street, we ate it; that is, my friends and I ate it, right out of the garbage and the old wet sacks. And we weren't poor. It just tasted good and probably there was something scandalous about doing it. Maybe that's a story about just how good watermelon tastes.

- JANUARY 18, 1995, GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI. I was talking to K about greatest character flaws. It seemed appropriate at that moment. I'm not sure she has one; that is, has a character flaw worth mentioning. Mine (I felt certain as I was saying it) was that I either had a capacity or a willingness to see everything as capable of being different from how it was. Nothing, in other words, was permanent. Maybe it's not a willingness at all, but a helplessness. It probably makes for shaky relationships of trust. It may also contribute to being a writer—to rig things around, for things to stay mutable. I remember Jonathan Raban's remark about Lowell working on a line by putting "not" before the verb. A rhythmical experiment with a moral consequence. ♦

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the liveliness that was Drenka repossessed her features, she told him that she loved him, that she couldn't possibly live without him, that, as she so Spartanly put it, "I couldn't carry out my responsibilities without you." Without what they got up to together, she could never be so good! Licking those sizable breasts, whose breastish reality seemed no less tantalizingly outlandish than it would have when he was fourteen, Sabbath told her that he felt the same about her, allowed it while looking up at her with that smile of his that did not make entirely clear who or what precisely he had it in mind to deride—confessed it certainly with nothing like her declamatory ardor, said it almost as though deliberately to make it appear perfunctory, and yet, stripped of all its derisive trappings, his "Feel the same way about you" happened to be true. Life was as unthinkable for Sabbath without the successful innkeeper's promiscuous wife as it was for her without the remorseless puppeteer. No one to conspire with, no one on earth with whom to give free rein to his most vital need!

"And you?" he asked. "Will you be faithful to me? Is that what you are suggesting?"

"I don't *want* anyone else."

"Since when? Drenka, I see you suffering, I don't want you to suffer, but I cannot take seriously what you are asking of me. How do you justify wishing to impose on me restrictions that you have never imposed on yourself? You are asking for fidelity of a kind that you've never bothered to bestow on your own husband and that, were I to do what you request, you would still be denying him because of *me*. You want monogamy outside marriage and adultery inside marriage. Maybe you're right and that's the only way to do it. But for that you will have to find a more rectitudinous old man." Elaborate. Formal. Perfectly overprecise.

"Your answer is no."

"Could it possibly be yes?"

"And so now you will get rid of me? Overnight? Like that? After thirteen years?"

"I am confused by you. I can't follow you. What exactly is happening here today? It's not I but you who proposed this ultimatum out of the fucking blue. It's you who presented *me* with the either/or. It's you who is getting rid of *me* overnight . . . unless, of course, I consent to become overnight a sexual creature of the kind I am not and never have been. Follow me, please. I must become a sexual creature of the kind that you have yourself never dreamed of being. In order to preserve what we have remarkably sustained by forthrightly pursuing together our sexual desires—are you with me?—*my* sexual desires must be deformed, since it is unarguable that, like you—you until today, that is—I am not by nature, inclination, practice, or belief a monogamous being. Period. You wish to impose a condition that either deforms me or turns me into a dishonest man with you. But like all other living creatures I suffer when I am deformed. And it shocks me, I might add, to think that the forthrightness that has sustained and excited us both, that provides such a healthy contrast to the routine deceitfulness that is the hallmark of a hundred million marriages, including yours and mine, is now less to your taste than the solace of conventional lies and repressive puritanism. As a self-imposed challenge, repressive puritanism is fine with me, but it is Titoism, Drenka, *inhuman Titoism,* when it seeks to impose its norms on others by self-righteously suppressing the satanic side of sex."

"You *sound* like stupid Tito when you lecture me like this! Please stop it!"

They hadn't spread their tarpaulin or removed a single item of their clothing but had remained in their sweatshirts and jeans, and Sabbath in his knitted seaman's cap, sitting backed against a rock. Drenka meanwhile paced in rapid circles the high ring of elephantine boulders, her hands fluttering anxiously through her hair or reaching out to feel against her fingertips the cool, familiar surface of their hideaway's rough walls—and could not but remind him of Nikki in the last act of "The Cherry Orchard." Nikki, his first wife, the fragile, volatile Greek-American girl whose pervasive sense of crisis he'd mistaken for a deep spirit and whom he had Chekhovianly nicknamed A-Crisis-a-Day until a day came when the crisis of being herself simply swept Nikki away.

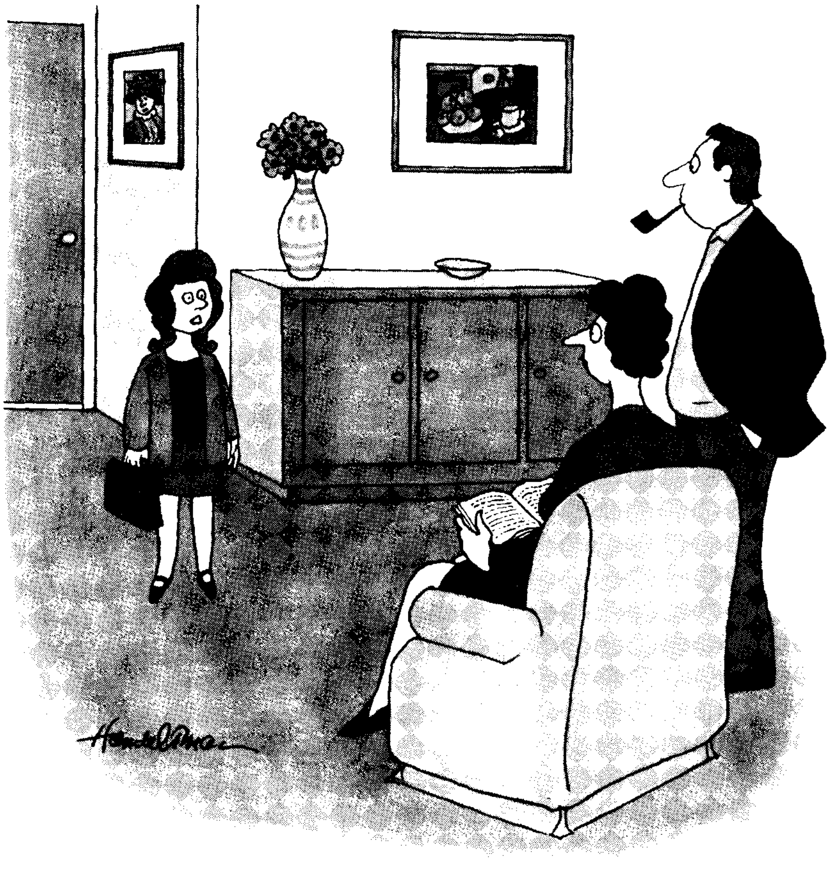
"Why," Drenka cried, "are you making fun of me? Of *course* you outsmart me, you outsmart everyone, *outtalk* every—"

"Yes, yes," he replied. "Luxurious unseriousness was what the outsmarter often felt the greater the seriousness with which he conversed. Detailed, scrupulous, loquacious rationality was generally to be suspected when Morris Sabbath was the speaker. Though not even he could always be certain whether the nonsense so articulated was wholly nonsensical. No, there was nothing simple about being as misleading—"

"Stop it! Stop it, please, being a maniac!"

"Only if you stop it being an idiot! Why on this issue are you suddenly so stupid? Exactly what am I to do, Drenka? Take an oath? Are you going to administer an oath? What are the words of the oath? Please list all the things that I am not allowed to do. Penetration. Is that it, is that all? What about a kiss? What about a phone call? And will you take the oath, too? And how will I know if you've upheld it?"

AND just when Silvija is coming back, Sabbath was thinking. Is that what's provoked all this, her fear of what she might be impelled to do for Sabbath in the excitement of the excitement? The summer before, Silvija, Matija's niece, had lived with the Baliches up at the house while working as a waitress in the inn's dining room. Silvija was an eighteen-year-old college student in Split and had taken her vacation in America to improve her English. Having shed any and all qualms in twenty-four hours, Drenka had brought to Sabbath, sometimes stuffed in her pocket, sometimes hidden in her purse, Silvija's soiled underthings. She wore them for him and pretended to be Silvija. She passed them up and down the length of his long white beard and pressed them to his parted lips. She bandaged his erection in the straps and cups, stroked him enwrapped in the silky fabric of Silvija's tiny bra. She drew his feet through the legs of Silvija's bikini underpants and worked them up as far as she could along his heavy thighs. "Say the things," he told her, "say everything," and she did. "Yes, you have my permission, you dirty man, yes," she said, "you can have her, I give her to you, you can have her tight young pussy, you dirty, filthy man. . . ." Silvija was a slight, seraphic thing with very white skin and reddish ringlets who wore small round glasses with metal frames that made her look like



"I lost the spelling bee on the word 'gangsta.'"

a studious child. "Photographs," Sabbath instructed Drenka, "find photographs. There must be photographs, they all take photographs." No, no way. Not meek little Silvija. Impossible, said Drenka, but the next day, going through Silvija's dresser, Drenka uncovered from beneath her cotton nighties a stack of Polaroids that Silvija had brought from Split to keep from becoming homesick. They were mainly pictures of her mother and father, her older sister, her boyfriend, her dog, but one photograph was of Silvija and another girl her age wearing only pantyhose and posing sideways in the doorway between two rooms of an apartment. The other girl was much larger than Silvija, a robust, bulky, big-breasted girl with a pumpkinish face who was hugging Silvija from behind while Silvija bent forward, her minute buttocks thrust into the other one's groin. Silvija had her head thrown back and her mouth wide open, feigning ecstasy or perhaps just laughing heartily at the silliness of what they were up to. On the reverse side of the photograph, in the half inch at the top where she carefully identified the people in each of the pictures, Silvija had written, in Serbo-Croatian, "*Nera odpozadi*"—Nera from the rear. The "*odpozadi*" was no less inflammatory than the picture, and he looked from one side of the photograph to the other all the while that Drenka improvised for him with Silvija's toylike brassiere. One Monday, when the kitchen at the inn was closed and Matija had taken Silvija off for the day to see historic Boston, Drenka squeezed into the folk dirndl with the full black skirt and the tight, embroidered bodice in which Silvija, like the other waitresses, served the Baliches' customers and, in the guest room where Silvija was spending the summer, laid herself fully clothed across the bed. There was she "seduced," "Silvija" protesting all the while that "Mr. Sabbath" must promise never to tell her aunt and her uncle what she had agreed to do for money. "I never had a man before. I only had my boyfriend, and he comes so soon. I never had a man like you." "Can I come inside you, Silvija?" "Yes, yes, I always wanted a man to come inside me. Just don't tell my aunt and my uncle!" "I fuck your aunt. I fuck Drenka." "Oh, do you? My aunt? Do you? Is she a better fuck than me?" "No, never, no." "Is her pussy tight like me?" "Oh, Silvija—your aunt is standing at the door. She's watching us!" "Oh, my God—!" "She wants to fuck with us, too." "Oh, my God, I never tried that before—"

Little was left undone that first afternoon, and Sabbath was still safely out of Silvija's room hours before the girl returned with her uncle. They couldn't have enjoyed themselves more—so said Silvija, Matija, Drenka, Sabbath. Everybody was happy that summer, including even Sabbath's wife, to whom he was more kindly disposed than he had been for years—there were times now over breakfast when he not only pretended to inquire about her A.A. meeting but pretended to listen to her answer. And Matija, who on his Mondays off drove Silvija into Vermont and New Hampshire and, on one occasion, to the very end of Cape Cod, seemed to have rediscovered in the role of uncle something akin to the satisfaction he had once derived from, all too successfully, making a real American out of his son. The summer had been an idyll for everyone, and when she left for home after Labor Day, Silvija was speaking endearingly unidiomatic English and carried a letter from Drenka to her parents—*not* the one devilishly composed in English by Sabbath—reiterating the invitation for the youngster to return to work in the restaurant and live with them again the next summer.

To Sabbath's question—whether, if she herself were to swear to an oath of fidelity, she would have the strength to uphold it—Drenka replied of course she would, yes, she *loved* him.

"You love your husband, too. You love Matija."

"That is not the same."

"But what about six months from now? For years you were angry at him and hated him. Felt so imprisoned by him you even thought of poisoning him. That's how crazy one man was making you. Then you began to love another man and discovered in time that you could now love Matija as well. If you didn't have to pretend to desire him, you could be a good and happy wife to him. Because of you I'm not entirely horrible to Roseanna. I admire Roseanna, she's a real soldier, trooping off to A.A. every night—those meetings are for her what this is for us, a whole other life to make home endurable. But now you want to change all that, not just for us, but for Roseanna and Matija. Yet why you want to do this you won't tell me."

"Because I want you to say, after thirteen years, 'Drenka, I love you, and you are the only woman I want.' The time has come to *tell* me that!"

"Get me rewrite!"

• •

"Why has it come? Have I missed something?"

She was crying again when she said, "I sometimes think you miss everything."

"I don't. No. I disagree. I actually don't think I miss anything. I haven't missed the fact that you were frightened to leave Matija even when things were at their worst, because if you left you'd be high and dry, without your share of the inn. You were afraid to leave Matija because he speaks your language and ties you to your past. You were afraid to leave Matija because he is, without doubt, a kind, strong, responsible man. But mostly Matija means money. Despite all this love you have for me, you never once suggested that we leave our mates and run off together, for the simple reason that I am penniless and he is rich. You don't want to be a pauper's wife, though it is all right to be a pauper's girlfriend, especially when you are able, with the pauper's encouragement, to fuck everybody else on the side."

This made Drenka smile—even in her misery the cunning smile that few aside from Sabbath had ever got to admire. "Yes? And if I had announced I was leaving Matija, you would have run away with me? As stupid as I am? Yes? As bad an accent as I have? Without all the life that I am bound by? Of course it's you that makes marriage to Matija possible—but it's Matija that makes it work for *you*."

"So you stay with Matija to make me happy."

"As much as anything—yes!"

"And that explains the other men as well."

"But it does!"

"And Christa?"

"Of course it was for you. You know it was for you. To please you, to excite you, to give you what you wanted, to give you the woman you never had! I love you, Mickey. I love being dirty for you, doing everything for you. I would give you anything, but I can no longer endure you to have other women. It hurts too much. The pain is just too great!"

As it happened, since picking up Christa several years back Sabbath had not really been the adventurous libertine Drenka claimed she could no longer endure, and consequently she already had the monogamous man she wanted, even if she didn't know it. To women other than her, Sabbath was by now quite unalluring, not just because he was absurdly bearded and obstinately peculiar and overweight and aging in every obvious way but also because in the aftermath of the scandal four years earlier with Kathy Goolsbee he'd become more dedicated than ever to marshalling the antipathy of just about everyone as though he were, in fact, battling for his rights. What he continued to tell Drenka, and what Drenka continued to believe, were lies, and yet deluding her about his seductive powers was so simple that it amazed him, and if he failed to stop himself it was not to delude himself as well, or to preen himself in her eyes, but because the situation was irresistible: gullible Drenka hotly pleading, "What happened? Tell me everything. Don't leave anything out," even while he eased into her the way Nera pretended in the Polaroid to be penetrating Silvija. Drenka remembered the smallest detail of his exciting stories long after he had forgotten even the broad outline, but then he was as naïvely transfixed by her stories, the difference being that hers were about people who were real. He knew they were real because, after each new liaison had got under way, he would listen on the extension while, beside him on the bed, holding the portable phone in one hand and his erection in the other, she drove the latest lover crazy with the words that never failed to do the trick. And afterward, each of these sated fellows said to her exactly the same thing: the ponytailed electrician with whom she took baths in his apartment, the uptight psychiatrist whom she saw alternate Thursdays in a motel across the state line, the young musician who played jazz piano one summer at the inn, the nameless middle-aged stranger with the J.F.K. smile whom she met in the elevator of the Ritz-Carlton . . . each one of them said, once he had recovered his breath—and Sabbath heard them saying it, craved their saying it, exulted in their saying it, knew it himself to be one of the few wonderfully indisputable, unequivocal truths a man could live by—each one conceded to Drenka, "There's no one like you."

And now she was telling him that she no longer wished to be this woman unanimously acknowledged as unlike all others. At fifty-two, stimulating enough still to make even conventional men reckless, she wanted to change and become somebody else—but did she know why? The secret realm of thrills and concealment, this was the poetry of her existence. Her crudeness was the most distinguishing force in her life, lent her life its distinction. What was she otherwise? What was he otherwise? She was his last link with another world, she and her great taste for the impermissible. As a teacher of estrangement from the ordinary, he had never trained a more gifted pupil; instead of being joined by the contractual they were interconnected by the instinctual and together could eroticize anything (except their spouses). Each of their marriages cried out for a countermarriage in which the adulterers attack their feelings of captivity. Didn't she know a marvel when she saw one?

He was badgering her so relentlessly because he was fighting for his life.

She not merely sounded as though she were fighting for hers but she looked it, looked as though she and not his mother were the ghost. During the last six months or so Drenka had been suffering from abdominal pains and nausea, and he wondered now if they were not symptoms of the anxiety that had been mounting in her as she approached the day in May that she had chosen to present this crazy ultimatum. Until today he had tended to account for her cramps and the occasional bouts of vomiting as the result of the pressures at the inn. Having been at the job for over twenty-three years, she was herself not surprised by the toll the work was now taking on her health. "You have to know food," she lamented wearily, "you have to know the law, you have to know every aspect of life there is. This happens in this business, Mickey, when you have to serve the public all the time—you become a burnt-out case. And Matija still cannot be flexible. This rule, that rule—but the smarter thing is to accommodate the people where you can instead of to say always no. If I could just get a break from the bookkeeping part of it. If I could get away from the staff part of it. Our older staff, they are people full of problems all their lives. The people who are married, the housekeepers, the dishwashers, you can know from the way they behave something is going on that has nothing to do with us. They bring in what's going on outside. And they never go to Matija to tell him what's wrong. They go to me, because I'm the easier one. Every summer he is going, going, going, and I'll say, 'So-and-So did this, did that,' and Matija says to me, 'Why do you always bring me these problems? Why don't you tell me something pleasant!' Well, because I'm upset by what's going on. To have these kids on the staff. I can't take any more kids. They don't know shit from Adams. So I wind up doing their job on the floor, like I'm the kid. Trays all over the place. I clean up. Carrying trays. A busgirl. It builds up, Mickey. If we had our son with us. But Matthew thinks the business is stupid. And sometimes I don't blame him. We have a million dollars' worth of liability insurance. Now I have to get *another* million dollars. We are advised to do this. The dock in the water at the inn's beach that everybody enjoys? The insurance company says, 'Don't do that anymore. Somebody's going to hurt themselves.' So the good things you would like to provide to the American public, they will just get you in trouble. And now—computers!"

WHEN, while he was fucking Drenka up at the Grotto, his mother hovered just above his shoulder, over him like the home-plate umpire peering in from behind the catcher's back, he would wonder if she had somehow popped out of Drenka's cunt the moment before he entered it, if that was where his mother's spirit lay curled up, patiently awaiting his appearance. Where else should ghosts come from? Unlike Drenka, who seemed for no reason to have been seized by the taboos, his tiny dynamo of a mother was now beyond all taboos—she could be on the lookout for him anywhere, and wherever she was he could detect her as though there were something supernatural about him as well, as though he transmitted a beam of filial waves that bounced off his invisible mother's presence and gave him her exact location. Either that, or he was going crazy. One way or another, he knew she was about a foot to the right of Drenka's blood-drained face. Perhaps she was not only listening to his every word from there, perhaps every provocative word he spoke she had a puppeteer's power to *make* him speak. It might even be she who was leading him to the disaster of losing the only solace he had. Suddenly his mother's focus had changed and, for the first time since 1944, the living son was more real to her than the dead one.

The final kink, thought Sabbath, searching the dilemma for a solution—the final kink is for the libertines to be faithful. Why not tell Drenka, "Yes, dear, I'll do it"?

Drenka had dropped in exhaustion onto the large granite outcropping near the center of the enclosure where they sometimes sat on beautiful days like this one eating the sandwiches she'd brought in her knapsack. There was a wilted bouquet at her feet, the first wildflowers of the spring, there from when she'd plucked them the week before while tramping up through the woods to meet him. Each year she taught him the names of the flowers, in her language and in his, and from one year to the next he could not remember even the English. For nearly thirty years Sabbath had been exiled in these mountains, and still he could name hardly anything. They didn't have this stuff where he came from. All these things growing were beside the point there. He was from the shore. There was sand and ocean, horizon and sky, daytime and nighttime—the light, the dark, the tide, the stars, the boats, the sun, the mists, the gulls. There were the jetties, the piers, the boardwalk, the booming, silent, limitless sea. Where he grew up they had the Atlantic. You could touch with your toes where America began. They lived in a stucco bungalow two short streets from the edge of America. The house. The porch. The screens. The icebox. The tub. The linoleum. The broom. The pantry. The ants. The sofa. The radio. The garage. The outside shower with the slatted wooden floor Morty had built and the drain that always clogged. In summer, the salty sea breeze and the dazzling light; in September, the hurricanes; in January, the storms. They had January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December. And then January. And then again January, no end to the stockpile of Januaries, of Mays, of Marches. August, December, April—name a month, and they had it in spades. They'd had endlessness. He'd grown up on endlessness and his mother—in the beginning they were the same thing. His mother, his mother, his mother, his mother, his mother . . . and then there was his mother, his father, Grandma, Morty, and the Atlantic at the end of the street. The ocean, the beach, the first two streets in America, then the house, and in the house a mother who never stopped whistling until December, 1944.

If Morty had come home alive, if the endlessness had ended naturally instead of with the telegram, if after the war Morty had started doing electrical work and plumbing for people, had become a builder at the shore, gone into the construction business just as the boom in Monmouth County was beginning . . . Didn't matter. Take your pick. Get betrayed by the fantasy of endlessness or by the fact of finitude. No, Sabbath could only have wound up Sabbath, begging for what he was begging, bound to what he was bound, saying what he did not wish to stop himself from saying.

"I'll tell you what"—his milk-of-human-kindness intonation—"I'll make a deal. I'll make the sacrifice you want. I will give up every woman but you. I'll say, 'Drenka, I love only you and want only you and will take whatever oath you wish to administer itemizing everything that I am forbidden to do.' But in return you must make a sacrifice."

"I will!" Excitedly she rose to her feet. "I want to! Never another man! Only you! To the end!"

"No," he said, approaching with his arms extended to her, "no, no, I don't mean that. That, you tell me, constitutes *no* sacrifice. No, I'm asking for something to test your stoicism and to test your truthfulness as you will be testing mine, a task just as repugnant to you as breaking the sacrament of infidelity is to me."

His arms were around her now, grasping her plump buttocks through her jeans. *You like when I turn around on you and you can see my ass. All men like that. But only you stick it in there, only you, Mickey, can fuck me there!* Not true, but a nice sentiment.

"I will give up all other women. In return," he told her, "you must suck off your husband twice a week."

"Aacch!"

"Aacch, yes. Aacch, exactly. You're gagging already. 'Aacch, I could never do that!' Can't I find something kinder? No."

Sobbing, she pulled herself free of him and pleaded, "Be *serious—this is serious!*"

"I am being serious. How odious can it be? It's merely monogamy at its most inhumane. Pretend it's someone else. That's what all good women do. Pretend it's the electrician. Pretend it's the credit-card magnate. Matija comes in two seconds anyway. You'll be getting everything you want and surprising a husband in the bargain, and it'll take only four seconds a week. And think of how it will excite *me*. The most promiscuous thing you have ever done. Sucking off your husband to please your lover. You want to feel like a real whore? That ought to do it."

"Stop!" she cried out, throwing her hands over his mouth. "I have cancer, Mickey! Stop! The pain has been because of cancer! I can't believe it! I *don't! I can die!*"

Just then the oddest thing happened. For the second time in a year a helicopter flew over the woods and then circled back and hovered directly above them. This time it had to be his mother.

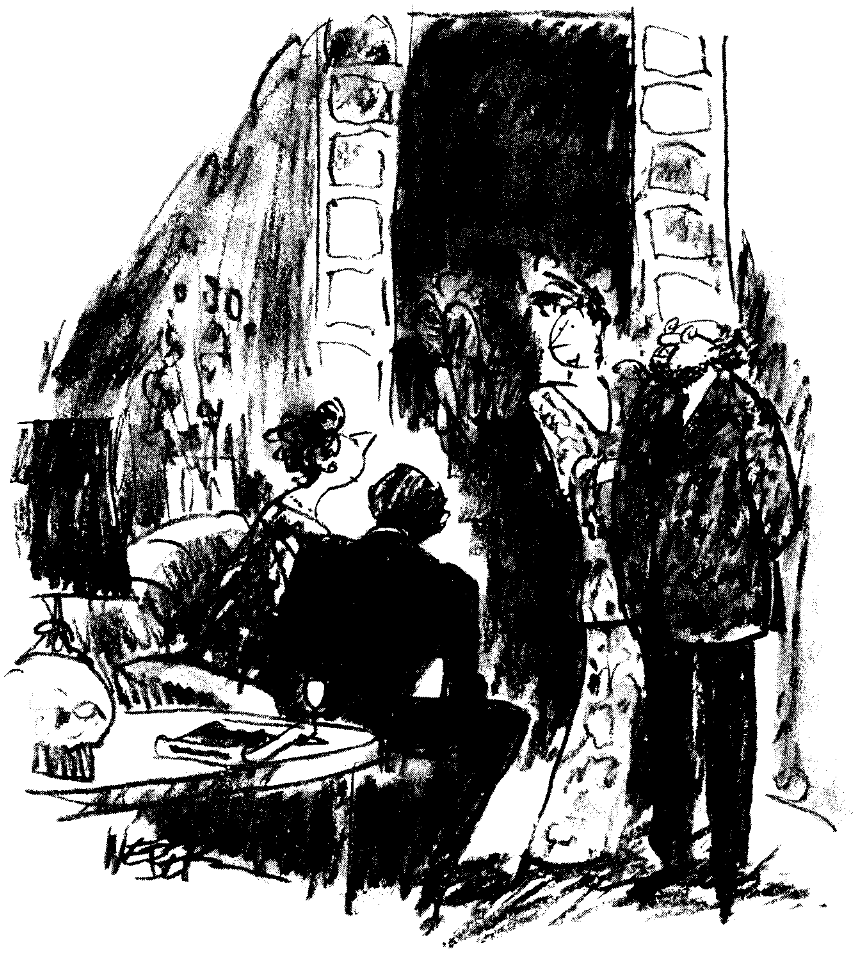
"Oh, my God," said Drenka and, with her arms around him, squeezed so tightly that the full weight of her clinging caused his knees to buckle—or perhaps they were about to buckle anyway.

Mother, he thought, this can't be so. First Morty, then you, then Nikki, now Drenka. There's nothing on earth that keeps its promise.

"Oh, I wanted, oh," cried Drenka as the helicopter's energy roared above them, a dynamic force to magnify the monstrous loneliness, a wall of noise tumbling down on them, their whole carnal edifice caving in. "I wanted you to say it without *knowing*, I wanted you to do it on your *own*," and here she wailed the wail that authenticates the final act of a classical tragedy. "I can die! If they can't stop it, darling, I will be dead in a year!"

Mercifully she was dead in six months, killed by a pulmonary embolus before there was time for the cancer, which had spread omnivorously from her ovaries throughout her system, to torture Drenka beyond even the tough capacity of her own ruthless strength. ◆

(*This is the first of two parts.*)



"Professor Roche has just won the coveted New York State Lottery."

In 1990, the first half of the handwritten manuscript of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," lost for more than a century, was found in an attic in Hollywood, California. The six-hundred-and-sixty-five-page document was reunited with the second half of the manuscript and is now on display at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, in Buffalo, New York. There are startling differences between Twain's handwritten text and the original, 1885 edition of the novel, but perhaps the most startling occurs in Chapter 9: the manuscript contains a previously unknown episode, which was removed from the novel sometime before publication, and is published here for the first time. Huck, who has escaped from his drunken Pap by faking his own death, and the runaway slave Jim are hiding out in a cave on Jackson's Island, in the Mississippi River, when a violent thunderstorm arises. The passage begins with Huck speaking.

JIM AND THE DEAD MAN

BY MARK TWAIN

"I BEEN in a storm here once before, with Tom Sawyer and Jo Harper, Jim. It was a storm like this, too—last summer. We didn't know about this place, and so we got soaked. The lightning tore a big tree all to flinders. Why don't lightning cast a shadow, Jim?"

"Well, I reckon it do, but I don't know."

"Well, it don't. *I* know. The sun does, and a candle does, but the lightning don't. Tom Sawyer says it don't, and it's so."

"Sho, child, I reckon you's mistaken 'bout dat. Gimme de gun—I's gwyne to see."

So he stood up the gun in the door, and held it, and when it lightened the gun didn't cast any shadow. Jim says:

"Well, dat's mighty cur'us—dat's oncommon cur'us. Now dey say a ghos' don't cas' no shadder. Why is dat, you reckon? Of course de reason is dat ghosts is made out'n lightnin', or else de lightnin' is made out'n ghosts—but I don't know which it is. I wisht I knowed which it is, Huck."

"Well I do, too; but I reckon there ain't no way to find out. Did you ever see a ghost, Jim?"

"Has I ever seed a ghos'? Well I reckon I has."

"O, tell me about it, Jim—tell me about it."

"De storm's a rippin' en a tearin', en a carryin' on so, a body can't hardly talk, but I reckon I'll try. Long time ago, when I was 'bout sixteen year old, my young Mars. William, dat's dead, now, was a stugent in a doctor college in de village whah we lived den. Dat college was a powerful big brick building, three stories high, en stood all by hersef in a big open place out to de edge er de village. Well, one night in de middle of winter young Mars. William he tole me to go to de college, en go up stairs to de dissectin' room on de second flo', en warm up a dead man dat was dah on de table, en git him soft so he can cut him up—"

"What for, Jim?"

"I don't know—see if can find sumfin in him, maybe. Anyways, dat's what he tole me. En he tole me to wait dah tell he come. So I takes a lantern en starts out acrost de town. My, but it was a-blowin' en a-sleetin' en cold! Dey wan't nobody stirrin in de streets en I could scasely shove along agin de wind. It was mos' midnight, en dreadful dark.

"I was mighty glad to git to de place, child. I onlocked de do' en went up stairs to de dissectin' room. Dat room was sixty foot long en twenty-five foot wide; en all along de wall, on bofe sides, was de long black gowns a-hangin', dat de stugents wears when dey's a-choppin' up de dead people. Well, I goes a swingin' de lantern along, en de shadders er dem gowns went to spreadin' out en drawin' in, along de wall, en it scairt me. It looked like dey was swingin' dey han's to git 'em warm. Well, I never looked at 'em no mo'; but it seemed like dey was a-doin' it behind my back jis' de same.

"Dey was a table 'bout forty foot long, down de middle er de room, wid fo' dead people on it, layin' on dey backs wid dey knees up en sheets over 'em. You could see de shapes under de sheets. Well, Mars. William he tole me to warm up de big man wid de black whiskers. So I unkivered one, en he didn't have no whiskers. But he had his eyes wide open, en I kivered him up quick, I bet you. De next one was sich a gashly sight dat I mos' let de lantern drap. Well, I skipped one carcass, en went for de las' one. I raise' up de sheet en I says, all right, boss, you's de chap I's arter. He had de black whiskers en was a rattlin' big man, en looked wicked like a pirate. He was naked—dey all was. He was a layin' on round sticks—rollers. I took de sheet off'n him en rolled him along feet fust, to de en' er de table befo' de fire place. His laigs was apart en his knees was cocked up some; so when I up-ended him on de en' er de table, he sot up dah lookin pretty natural, wid his feet out en his big toes stickin' up like he was warmin' hissef. I propped him up wid de rollers, en den I spread de sheet over his back en over his head to help warm him, en den when I was a tyin' de corners under his chin, by jings he opened his eyes! I let go en stood off en looked at him, feelin' mighty shaky. Well, he didn't look at nuthin particular, en didn't do nuffin', so I knowed he was good en dead, yit.

"But I couldn't stan' dem eyes, you know. It made me feel all-overish, jis' to look at 'em. So I pulled de sheet cler down over his face en under his chin, en tied it hard—en den dah he sot, all naked

CULVER PICTURES

in front, wid his head like a big snowball, en de sheet a-kiverin' his back en fallin down on de table behind. So dah he sot, wid his laigs spread out, but blame it he didn't look no better'n what he did befo', his head was so awful, somehow.

"But dem eyes was kivered up, so I reckoned I'd let him stan' at dat, en not try to improve him up no mo'. Well, I stoop' down between his laigs on de hathstone, en took de candle out'n de lantern en hilt it in my han' so as to make mo' light. Dey was some embers in de fire place, but de wood was all to de yuther en' er de room. Whils' I was a stoopin' dah, gittin' ready to go arter de wood, de candle flickered, en I thought de ole man moved his laigs. It kinder made me shiver. I put out my han' en felt o' his laig dat was poked along pas' my lef' jaw, en it was cold as ice. So I reckoned he didn't move. Den I felt o' de laig dat was poked pas' my right jaw, en it was powerful cold, too. You see I was a stoopin' down right betwix' 'em.

"Well, pretty soon I thought I see his toes move; dey was jis' in front er me, on bofe sides. I tell you, honey, I was gittin' oneasy. You see dat was a great big old ramblin' bildin', en nobody but me in it, en dat man over me wid dat sheet roun' his head, en de wind a wailin' roun' de place like sperits dat was in trouble, en de sleet a-drivin' agin' de glass; en den de clock struck twelve in de village, en it was so fur away, en de wind choke up de soun' so dat it only soun' like a moan—dat's all. Well, thinks I, I wisht I was out'n dis; what *is* gwyne to become er me?—en dis feller's a-movin' his toes, I *knows* it—I kin *see* 'em move—en I kin jis' feel dem eyes er his'n en see dat ole dumplin' head done up in de sheet, en—

"Well, sir, jis' at dat minute, *down he comes*, right a-straddle er my neck wid his cold laigs, en kicked de candle out!"

"My! What did you do, Jim?"

"Do? Well I never done nuffin'; only I jis' got up en heeled it in de dark. *I* warn't gwyne to wait to fine out what he wanted. No sir; I jis' split down stairs en linked it home a-yelpin' every jump."

"What did your Mars. William say?"

"He said I was a fool. He went dah en found de dead man on de flo' all comfortable, en took en chopped him up. Dod rot him, I wisht I'd a had a hack at him."

"What made him hop on to your neck, Jim?"

"Well, Mars. William said I didn't prop him good wid de rollers. But I don't know. It warn't no way for a dead man to act, nohow; it might a scairt some people to death."

"But Jim, he warn't rightly a ghost—he was only a dead man. Didn't you ever see a real sure-'nough ghost?"

"You bet I has—lots of 'em."

"Well, tell me about them, Jim."

"All right, I will, some time; but de storm's a-slackin' up, now, so we better go en tend to de lines en bait 'em agin." ♦

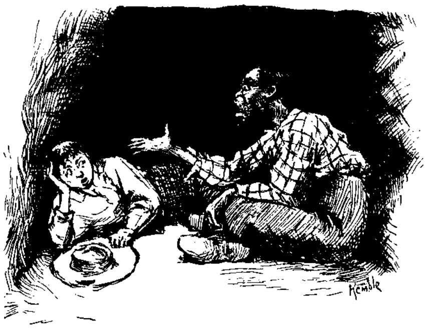
HUCK, CONTINUED

Five American writers reflect on Twain's novel and our most persistent moral dilemma.

MARK TWAIN was America's first superstar. He created his own persona—the unsmiling man in dazzling white, a clever icon designed to last. Twain's coarse frontier humor and his glib inventiveness with the new American language assaulted the Eastern establishment and changed American literature irrevocably, the way Elvis Presley, born exactly a hundred years after Twain, changed American music.

Mark Twain's original boyhood language, the deepest source of his artistic energy, is the language of my grandparents and parents, and it is still spoken throughout the mid-South, from the Appalachians through the Ozarks. I'm partial to a culture that uses the phrase "telling a story" to mean "lying." The "whang" in Huckleberry Finn's voice is as familiar to me as the speech of my parents. They would say "chimbley" and "dust rag" and "fair to middling" and use fishing worms for bait and bark their shins, and they would say "curious" to mean peculiar. This language has a certain higgledy-piggledy quality, which accounts for Huckleberry Finn's outlandish way of talking—Twain's exaggeration of the actual speech of a young boy. It's a language that functions through its potential for inventiveness just as the necessities of the frontier called for ingenious solutions—making do with what was at hand. I call it rigged-up language. That's how Twain came up with "spider-webby," "waffle-iron face," "premature balditude," "googling out," "ring-streaked-and-striped," etc. This way of talking often uses more words—and especially a lot of prepositions and adverbs and intensifiers strung together, each deeply meaningful and particular. Instead of "forsythia," my grandmother might say "them yaller bushes up yonder around to the back of the barn." Or she might say, "Go get me that jar—the one that did for your last-summer lightning-bug catcher—down from up off of that board that's tacked up all antigodlin out yonder in the smokehouse. It's way back in the back." My mother told me not long ago that the tornado that hit "come up from down towards Tennessee." Having to piece scraps of words together keeps the brain active and the ear lively.

—BOBBIE ANN MASON



E.W. KEMBLE/MARK TWAIN PROJECT, THE BANCROFT LIBRARY

•

IN my boyhood summers, we lived in a Dutch-fieldstone house a dozen yards from the western shore of the Hudson, and the river's damp sounds and smells, its wide white expanse of glassy or wind-mottled water, its brackish tides, its ceaseless movement, and its night lappings impinged on my young consciousness unawares. Twenty miles up from the

Mark Twain in 1874, in the Elmira, New York, studio where he worked on "Huckleberry Finn."

THE MARK TWAIN HOUSE, HARTFORD, CT.

Battery, I waded in the Hudson, swam in it, fished in it (for eels and tommycod and blue crabs), skipped stones on it, shot fireworks over it, and all day dozily studied its upstream and downstream traffic. Catboats, rowboats, and runabouts appeared and went away, while, over in the eastern channel, river freighters and sluggish tugs with low processions of barges made passage with banner-streaming vessels from the great white fleet of the Hudson River Day Line. Way off, along the New York Central's water-level route, trains silently drew and redrew the straight line of the farther bank.

I must have been eleven or twelve when I first encountered "Huckleberry Finn," but from the moment Huck and Jim took to the river—*their* river, the Mississippi—I was overtaken with a thrilling proprietary excitement, because, of course, Mark Twain had it right: this was what a great wide-water, north-south stream was like, and here was how it felt to pass time on its banks. For the first time, literature had confirmed for me a patch of life that I recognized from my own experience.

In the book, Twain appears to give little attention to scenery, but his river-prospect interludes preserve the clarity and unhurried gazings of an empty-sky morning passed within the sound of moving water:

> A little smoke couldn't be noticed, now, so we would take some fish off of the lines, and cook up a hot breakfast. And afterwards we would watch the lonesomeness of the river, and kind of lazy along, and by and by lazy off to sleep. . . . Next you'd see a raft sliding by, away off yonder, and maybe a galoot on it chopping, because they're most always doing it on a raft; you'd see the ax flash, and come down—you don't hear nothing; you see that ax go up again, and by the time it's above the man's head, then you hear the *k'chunk!*—it had took all that time to come over the water.

The famous passage—it comes along early in Chapter 19—lies near the center of this most central American novel, and one returns to it each time with refreshed alertness. One might even look at that "sliding by" and then recall how often Twain uses the word or a variant—not just when he is writing about the river but when he is writing about Huck Finn himself. Huck by turns slides out of houses and bedrooms, slips off quiet, slides into a canoe, slips down a ladder, clears out away from his drunken father, and, with his companion, Jim, hurries again to the raft and lets her go a-sliding down the river. Each of these hero-outcasts holds secret hopes of finding a place for himself somewhere in proper, dry-land society, but they are kept on the run by the grownups they encounter—thieves and lynchers, rapscallions and skin-artists and murderers—during their precipitous vertical odyssey. Almost without noticing, they discover that the great sliding river itself is the only constant, their one fixed home.

"Huckleberry Finn" invites rereading,

but I find less sunshine in it each time around. Its cruel and oafish backwater crowds, and the itinerant grotesques who prey upon them, don't feel all that funny or far away, and the bitter pains of Jim's condition, on which Twain poured out his irony, are dated more in details than in substance. I notice, too, as I did not before, that Huck and Jim become older in the book, partly as the result of their comical and horrific experiences but really because they are also riding that other stream whose insensible, one-way flow is felt perhaps even by children staring at distant sails and trains on a summer afternoon. In the end, the two run out of river, and so does their story, which becomes less when it must find a way to stop. Time has slid away, and we wish ourselves upstream again, beginning the voyage.

—ROGER ANGELL

•

YOU can't know about Huck Finn without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer." In that earlier rendition of a remembered past, Twain recalls Hannibal, Missouri, in the eighteen-forties as a perpetual summer in which distinct and sweetly irreconcilable life forms, the Child and the Adult, play out their comedic fates. Tom's adventures end in triumph, and the young reader is given the subtextual assurance that finally there is a bond that unites young and old in one moral world, in which truth can be realized and forgiveness is always possible.

The young reader? Twain had to be told that he'd written a book for children—he had intended an adult novel. He wrote by whim, without plan, giving himself totally to the pleasures of improvisation and the music he heard in speech. He was a stage humorist long before he became a literary figure. He was a colleague of Petroleum V. Nasby and Artemus Ward before he became a neighbor of Harriet Beecher Stowe of Hartford, and a guest at the New England domiciles of Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

But Twain had to have understood, finally, that, in its celebratory comedy, his book was too sentimental, too forgiving of the racist backwater that had nurtured him. He had ignored slavery as if it hadn't existed. And after all was said and done his Tom Sawyer character was a centrist, a play rebel, who, like Twain himself, had been welcomed into the bosom of a ruling society he sallied against.

Then came the great moment in American literary history, when his eye turned to the kid on Tom's left.

In "Huckleberry Finn," Twain releases himself from the tyranny of his stage voice, the voice of amused tolerance with which he has written everything heretofore, and gives the narration to Tom Sawyer's unwashed, unredeemable sidekick, Huck. He speaks as a child—and forgoes childish things. And in this rendition of his past his vision of the antebellum South is anything but celebratory. We find not loving adults enduring the mischief of their youngsters but killers, con men, drunks, and thieves. Where Tom Sawyer hid out on Jackson's Island because his little girlfriend Becky Thatcher rejected him, Huck flees there, in desperation, to escape the abuses of his alcoholic father, who has threatened to kill him.

Huck links up with Miss Watson's escaped slave Jim, and their adventures rafting down the Mississippi are a variant of the slave narrative. Here the thrown voice of the child comes to genius: Huck, making the socially immoral choice to assist the escape of a slave—someone's rightful property, he thinks—creates in himself an ethically superior morality that he defines as outlaw, and appropriate to such a worthless tramp as he. And Twain can deal with the monstrous national catastrophe of slaveholding, not head on, in righteousness, in the manner of Harriet Beecher Stowe, but with the sharper stick, the deeper thrust, of irony.

Huck and Jim are survivalists, rafting downstream at night, hiding in the cottonwood banks by day, braving storms, fogs, and steamboat collisions to get Jim to freedom. Civilization here is not, as it is in "Tom Sawyer," a matter of having your neck washed by a prim maiden aunt. Civilization is buying and selling people, and working them to death. Civilization is a vicious confidence game played on a field of provincial ignorance. Huck, smart and resourceful, is a master of Sawyeresque deception and tale-telling as he confronts the treacherous adults who populate the towns along the river.

And then something terrible happens—terrible for Huck, terrible for American literature. The narrative moves inland, Jim is captured, and Twain brings back Tom Sawyer. Though the moral mind of the book is Huck's—as Jim's protector, he has been the one to suffer the crisis of his country's conscience—it is given to Tom Sawyer to stage Jim's ultimate escape from the Phelps plantation. Huck, who has been until now our eyes, our voice, moves back to the sidekick role, and the book wallows in foolishness, playing out, long past credibility, Tom's nonsensical, overcomplicated, boy's-book fantasy escape plan. And to render everything completely pointless it turns out that Jim has been freed legally in the late Miss Watson's will, as Tom has known all along.

The greatest picaresque since Cervantes and Diderot is thrown away in doddering shtick. Twain, in his habitual practice of letting a book write itself, stopped work on "Huckleberry Finn," resumed a couple of years later, put the manuscript away in the drawer again for a few more years, eventually finishing and publishing it eight years, and several other books, after he began. And somewhere along the line he lost his resolve or his way, counting, misguidedly, on the old props of his stagecraft—the mischievous boy and his pranks—to rescue him. They are tawdry here in the real world of Huck and Jim; with the life of Jim at stake, they are cruelly inappropriate.

As a reconstructed Southerner, Twain was a repository of all the contradictions in his society. Tom's book and Huck's book are conflicting visions of the same past, and at the end one vision prevails, and it is the wrong one. The same thing that made Twain blow his greatest work generates its troublesome moral conundrum—the depiction of Jim. Twain loved dialect; he had an ear for it and it came easily to him, so it is Huck Finn who struggles against the white mores of his time to help the black man, Jim, escape from slavery, but it is Huck's progenitor who portrays Jim, in minstrelese, as a gullible black child-man led by white children.

The irony may not be redemptive.

—E. L. DOCTOROW

•

IT'S quite likely that if Mark Twain had merely used the word "slave" instead of the word "nigger," which appears more than two hundred times in the course of "Huckleberry Finn," many of those who have recently attacked the book on the ground of racism would have been at least partially appeased. But "nigger" remains our most powerful secular blasphemy. Although a twelve-year-old Missourian would have had scant familiarity, in the eighteen-forties, with the word "slave"—a term that was generally confined to government proclamations, religious discussions, and legal documents—Huck's innocent vernacular usage appears to be one of the reasons for the panic that recently impelled the National Cathedral School, in Washington, to remove "Huckleberry Finn" from its tenth-grade curriculum, and to shift it from required to elective courses in the eleventh and twelfth grades. Only the nature of the school surprises: over the past decades, the book has been suppressed and banished from library shelves innumerable times.

In recent years, John H. Wallace, a black educator from Fairfax, Virginia, has campaigned to protect youth by insisting that "Huckleberry Finn" be taken away from school libraries, and has published what has to be an all-time curiosity in the annals of bowdlerization: a version of the text from which every use of the word "nigger" has been expunged. The crusade of Wallace, who has described his nemesis as "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written," is an extreme example of the animus that has coalesced around the novel.

"Huckleberry Finn" reveals the mind of a writer with equivocal feelings about race. The wonder is that Twain's upbringing and experience (including a brief stint in the Confederate Army) should have left him so little tainted with bigotry. Although most of the book's millions of readers, including many black people, have found no racism in it (Ralph Ellison wrote admiringly of the author's grasp of the tormented complexity of slavery, his awareness of Jim's essential humanity), "Huckleberry Finn" has never really struggled up out of a continuous vortex of discord, and probably never will, as long as its enchanting central figures, with their confused and incalculable feelings for each other, remain symbols of our own racial confusion.

—WILLIAM STYRON

•

THE first time I was called a nigger was on the playground on my first day of school in Bedford, Pennsylvania—in a region some have called God's country, because of an abundance of both nature and churches. There was also an abundance of bigots, and a shortage of blacks; epithets were uncommon. When a little boy of Irish extraction confronted me with "nigger," I had never before heard the word. If he hadn't bloodied my nose, I'd not have known to cry.

I kept this, and similar incidents, secret until a pair of bullies stripped me and whipped me with briars, to the usual soundtrack. Then I consulted my elders. My grandmother told me to ignore "poor white trash," and taught me to keep my face impassive "to deny them satisfaction." My mother advised me to walk away with dignity. My father said that I should turn the other cheek. Fortunately, my uncle taught me combat skills; I escaped elementary school alive.

My first encounter with "nigger" in a book came several years later, when I read "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," which I liked, though I did not like Tom. In fact, I loathed that lazy, lying hooky player, but I pitied "the juvenile pariah of the village," Huckleberry Finn, until he says, "Jim told Ben Rogers, and Ben told a nigger, and the nigger told me." Tom replies, "They'll all lie. Leastways all but the nigger. I don't know *him*. But I never see a nigger that *wouldn't* lie."

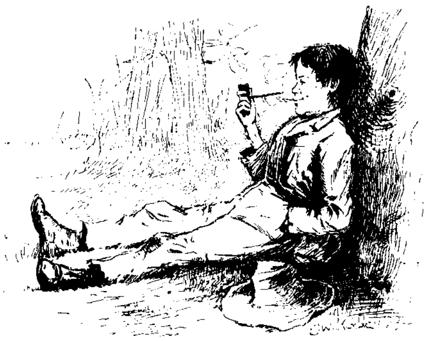
I almost put the book down. Suddenly, however, I saw a difference: both boys called the Negro "nigger," but Tom decided he was a liar, not because he knew he had lied, as with the white boys, but because *all* Negroes lied. Huck, on the other hand, considered the Negro as reliable as the white boys. When Huck said "nigger," he meant Negro. When Tom said "nigger," he meant liar. Tom was a bigot. Huck might not be. Hooked, I followed him to his own book.

There he says "nigger" often but means nothing by it—and Jim uses it as frequently. Huck first identifies Jim as "Miss Watson's big nigger," but afterward calls him Jim. Tom wants to tie Jim up and play tricks on him; Huck not only refuses but turns to Jim for advice, and argues with him. In town, Huck tells Tom he wouldn't want to eat with a Negro "as a steady thing"; on Jackson's Island, he just says, "Pass me along another hunk of fish and some hot cornbread."

Huck does treat Jim like a nigger once, in Chapter 15. After the two have been separated in a fog, they are reunited, but instead of expressing his relief Huck mocks Jim with an outlandish tale and calls him "a tangle-headed old fool." Jim's response is something my grandmother might have said: "Trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed." I expected Huck to bristle at this, but he tells us, "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither." So, I thought, not all poor white trash are bigots. My responses may have been unsophisticated, but, reading "Huckleberry Finn," I began to distinguish connotation from denotation, to judge intent by action rather than rhetoric.

"Huckleberry Finn" is the most frequently taught novel in the United States, and probably the most frequently attacked. In previous decades, the attacks came from whites worried about what has come to be known as "family values." Now the attacks come from blacks disturbed by the word "nigger." I understand parents' desire to protect children from the word's hurtful connotations, but I believe that "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" brought valuable lessons home to me, not despite the word "nigger" but because of it. I also understand the impulse to attack "offensive" expressions. The pervasiveness of American racism often makes me feel not offended so much as overwhelmed. And "nigger" is offensive not because it was said by literary characters in 1845 but because it is *meant* by literal Americans in 1995. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that the problem of the color line is the problem of the twentieth century. What is offensive is that it will be the problem of the twenty-first. America ought to be a place where "nigger" has only historical meaning. Until that happens, the safest place for a child to learn about the word is in a book. From there, it cannot bloody any child's nose.

—DAVID BRADLEY



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JOURNALS

DELIRIUM AND DETACHMENT

The secret of being a writer.

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

SEPTEMBER 7, 1973. At home, an attack of tachycardia that left me breathless and exhausted. When I had my first, at the age of 18, at Syracuse, I was terrified. I struggled against it, nearly suffocating. The second attack took place in a gym class—a girl had run into me, hard, while we were playing basketball—and was so bad I had to be taken to the infirmary. I remember turning the pages of Boswell's "Life of Johnson," trying to read. Tears in my eyes because, while I wasn't in pain, I thought I might die. Now the attacks are as surprising as always, but not as frightening. If you imagine you're going to die once, and give up, the second time you give up immediately, and without a struggle there's no terror.

• NOVEMBER 17, 1974. Thinking back to the Detroit riots of 1967—fires a few blocks away on Livernois, looting and general panic, and National Guardsmen stationed nearby. Homeowners, we felt the riots as threats, necessarily; but the rioters themselves must have felt a marvellous exhilaration, a sense of sudden, absolute, unguessed-at freedom—the freedom to destroy, which is usually the privilege of the ruling classes.

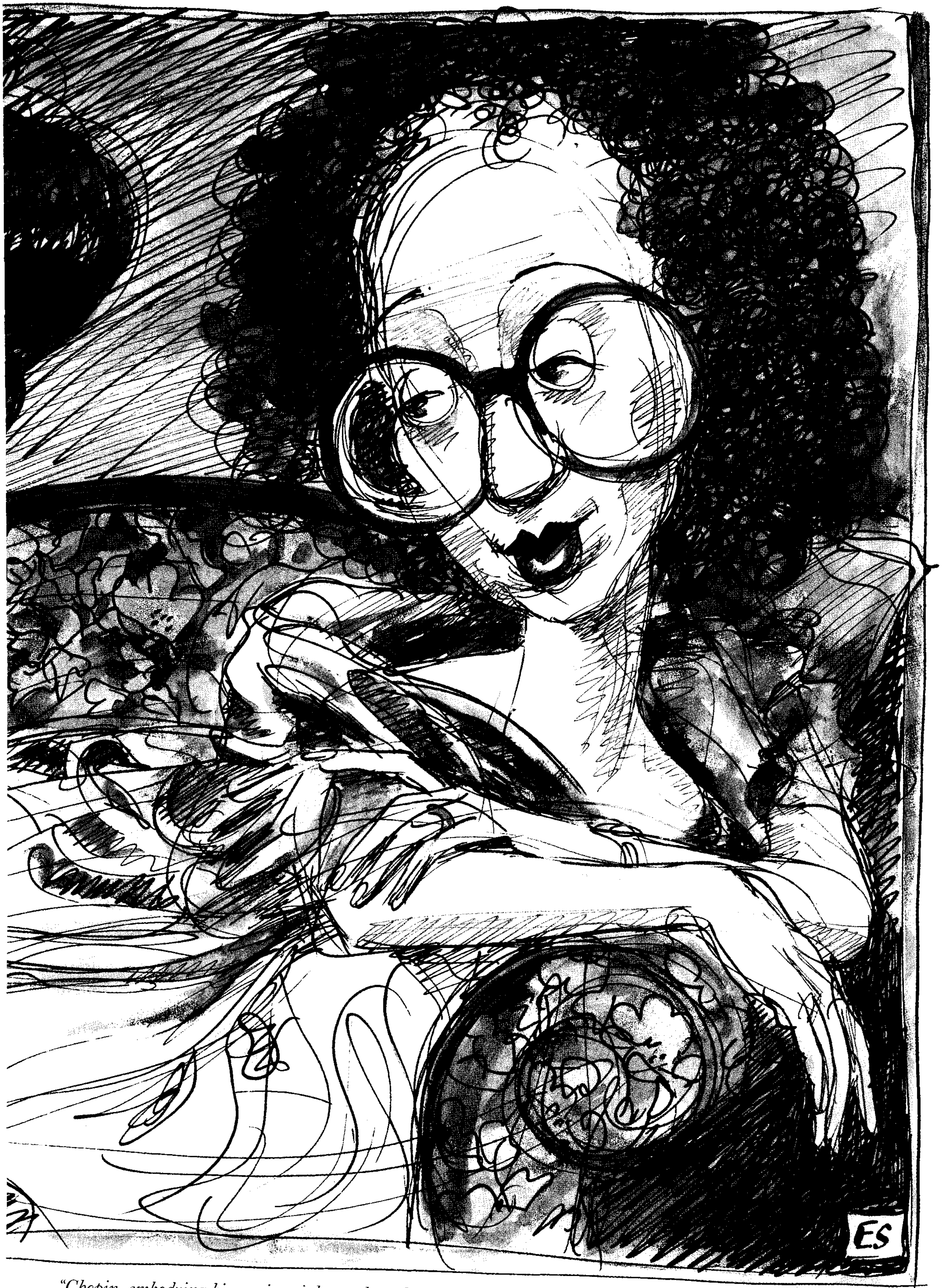
Found a letter of Anne Sexton's mailed on June 4, 1973.

The shock of finding the letter. And the mingled fear, dismay, excitement in rereading it.

Suicides are always judged *as if* they were admissions of defeat, but one can take the viewpoint that their having lived as long as they did is an accomplishment of a kind. Knowing herself suicidal as a very young girl, Virginia Woolf resisted—made heroic attempts to attach herself to the exterior world—as did Anne Sexton: as do we all.

• JANUARY 12, 1975. In "Wonderland" I was dictated to by an organizational

EDWARD SOREL



"Chopin, embodying his music, might not have heard it as his most intelligent and passionate admirers did."

clarity that forbade expansion, wanting the work to be "perfect" in its form . . . Its curve is tragic. It was a deliberate tragedy, worked out in detail, structurally meticulous. Much more, but that *formal* rigor was the mistake; I must have been listening to or reading old-fashioned critics, though it might have been simply that I saw, in the mid- and late sixties, that certain American pathways were tragic and those who took them lived out a tragic curve, a tragic destiny.

- FEBRUARY 11, 1975. Dinner the other evening with John Gardner and his wife. He imagines we are antithetical and perhaps we are. He believes that art can be "directed" far more than I allow. Perhaps. It has not been my experience, however, that anything valuable (to me) has ever come out of a highly conscious, highly deliberate act of writing.

- JULY 26, 1975. Returned from three weeks on the road. Travel is so addictive, I really didn't want to come home this time. The anonymity of travel beckons to me. No mail! No telephone calls! No constant restriction to a few cubic feet of consciousness: Joyce Carol Oates. Now that I am back, I am fated to spend hours as a kind of secretary to that person. As Oates's public fortunes rise, mine must necessarily fall; as hers level off or decline, I gain.

- APRIL 7, 1976. My yearning: for the fantastic, for the exploratory; but also for the scaled-down, the very human. I seem to want both. They cannot be contained within a single work very successfully. The *feel* of "Moby Dick" vs. the *feel* of "To the Lighthouse."

- APRIL 29, 1976. The pleasures of writing "experimental" fiction are mainly those of the writer. I can write that way, but can't force myself to read very far in others' experimental writing. It is so self-conscious, so deliberate, artificial, restrictive . . . a peculiar sort of puritanism despite its ostensible freedom.

- JULY 29, 1976. The secret of being a writer: not to expect others to value what you've done as you value it. Not to expect anyone else to perceive in it the emotions you have invested in it. Not indifference, not apathy . . . but self-containment is the result.

- JANUARY 8, 1977. Some commotion yesterday. Arrived at the university but couldn't teach my 11 o'clock class because during the night my teaching assistant had received a telephone call from some man announcing that he was going to kill me. "I'll kill her, I'll kill her! . . . She hates us, she hates all of us. I'll kill her and you'll help me. . . ." The man called me a "skinny bitch" over the phone, which I take to be a compliment, sort of. How hurt my feelings would have been if he'd said "dowdy" or "fat" or "ugly" bitch.

  Why anyone should want to kill me I don't know, it's all embarrassing. Geoff Hayman, Special Investigation Division, is the man I'm supposed to call if the would-be murderer appears. I will crawl bleeding and gasping for breath to the nearest pay phone and dial Detective Hayman, ext. 6632.

- JANUARY 16, 1977. My bouts of discouragement, dread. Bewilderment. What is the *point* of a life's work when it can bring upon the writer such obloquy . . . cruelty. The average, private individual will never open a journal or a book to read vicious things said against him, nor will he come across seemingly "objective" judgments that would sweep away everything he has attempted.

- JULY 21, 1978. I think it must be the case that each fall I enter the world of a new novel in order to counterbalance the tremendous pull of the external world, in which I move about, evidently, as an unusually "sensitive" person . . . fascinated by others . . . yearning to know them, to become close with them . . . utterly entranced, at times, with the mere fact that there *are* other people, and that they experience themselves as the primary center of consciousness just as I do. That fact alone . . . Well, that fact alone is staggering.

- JULY 28, 1978. If I didn't have my writing, what would be more delightful than to give myself up completely to a study of music, concentrating on Chopin, of course. With all my limitations, my hesitancies . . . But who cares? There's a kind of hearty cheerfulness in not being a contender for any degree of excellence. What point, really, is there in *being* the genius? If genius is a natural event, a gift, a fluke, perhaps the genius's contemporaries or admirers benefit most from it. Chopin, embodying his music, might not have *heard* it as his most intelligent and passionate admirers did.

- DECEMBER 24, 1978. Working daily, 5 or 6 hours, on "Bellefleur." It felt, yesterday, as if I were crawling on the floor, pushing a bean with my nose. But I suppose it *is* progress. When I look back and reread earlier chapters, having pushed out of my mind the painstaking difficulty and tedium of actually writing them, they *do* seem good; they read with the slightly stilted, arcane, "atavistic" air I want for "Bellefleur."

- JANUARY 4, 1979. The idyllic nature of silence. Here, at my desk, for hours, since about 8:30 this morning (and now it is 7:30), utterly engrossed with the serpentine coils of language that constitute "Bellefleur."

  How could anything, even the most dazzling content, interest the writer more than the precise flow of language, the peculiar exhausting tyrannical arabesques a certain voice demands?

- FEBRUARY 19, 1979. I suppose once I finish this novel I will be heartsick to leave its craggy authority (or do I mean cranky, quirky) . . . At the same time something keeps pressing me onward; I must force myself, quite deliberately, to stop for a while . . . to play my preludes and nocturnes and exercise pieces . . . Is this, perhaps, what is meant by a *compulsion*?

- JULY 14, 1979. The headachy delirium of one day (yesterday, for instance, when I wrote hour upon hour upon hour, all day long, until 10 P.M.), the detachment of the next (today, for instance, when I revised and coolly rearranged what I'd done in yesterday's debauch).

- AUGUST 29, 1979. Are you bitter, someone recently inquired, about "feminist" dismissal of your work (which I hadn't actually known about, I must admit) when so much that is unambitious and shopworn-feminist is praised?

  When men attempt large, ambitious novels it's considered only natural—only

RECOLLECTION, IN TRANQUILLITY

He ran his hard hands over me like Braille,
he liked to bruise the skin of breasts, rib cage.
“Why are you so thin?” he asked.
My body a rebuke to his stern solid flesh.

What’s the effort of love but a kind of swimming
through another’s flesh?
A man’s need, so sudden & hot!
It’s intimidating no matter how many times
it’s happened in just the same way.

It’s faces that love, we know that.
We know better, but we know that.
Mine was covered in a porcelain shell of which I think
I was vain: large liquid-empty eyes, polite mouth,
skin without history.
Beneath that face, the other he never saw.
Contorted in strain, in hope, in anger.
Female passion that’s sheerly muscle,
mouth like a pike’s.

He saw the one, spoke and pleaded with the one,
those eyes, that mouth, but the other, beneath,
he never knew, nor guessed.
What worried him was—“Sometimes I think I might kill you.”

In the end nothing came of it.
We remained married to other people. We grew older.

—Joyce Carol Oates

masculine; a woman who attempts such novels risks being considered a rival by men, and a deserter of the cause by women. One would like to think that a *woman* novelist who chose to write about *unwomanly* subjects might be valued by someone . . . even by feminists.

• April 14, 1980. My mind darts about these days plotting and fantasizing not scenes in my novel but ways of getting out of social engagements.

(Princeton fantasies! Not sexual exploits or romantic encounters; not even literary, academic, or scholarly esteem; but quiet . . . peace . . . tranquillity . . . anonymity . . . invisibility . . . *no dinner parties for a week! two weeks!* Could anything be more shameless, more gloriously and deliciously self-indulgent, than to fantasize *no dinner parties for two weeks!!!!*)

• August 1, 1980. Being fairly poor at one time, and from a family that had known real poverty; easing, along with my parents (that is, my U.A.W. father), into a sort of part-middle-class as a consequence of that great force the American labor movement (God bless it!—my Wobbly grandfather above all); easing then by way of friends and social contacts into a genuine upper-middle-class & “lower-upper” . . . Hence I am not only American but a kind of cross-section of America—barring the real wealth and the real poverty. Which is most authentically myself I can’t know but would guess—judging from the odd jarring sympathies I feel for even monsters like Manson—that I place myself psychologically *even below* the decent respectable working-class background of my childhood.

• December 23, 1981. Pleasures of reading a novel so incontestably great it hasn’t any aura of a quality so tedious and self-conscious as “greatness.” (“Don Quixote,” the Cohen translation.) I want to drag my heels, read as slowly as possible. It’s the sensation I have at the end of writing a novel, nearing the end. For months I’ve been driven, besotted, anxious, groping, wanting only freedom, and now—and now—will I be granted this precious “freedom” and find it utterly vacuous?

• June 25, 1982. The flood of emotion I could barely keep back, at the Princeton airport, seeing off my parents. Again. “I love you so much,” my mother murmured, embracing me, each of us trying not to cry. But I can’t not cry. I think of: those young, attractive, somewhat glamorous figures (judging by the old snapshots) and of my (young) grandmother too. My mind fixes upon old memories. Snatches of conversations. The glimpse of a back yard from a forgotten window or doorway. Living on Main Street, Lockport. Visiting my grandmother on Grand Street. Then elsewhere. Always rented flats, apartments. Wood-frame houses. And the failing, failed farm in Millersport. My handsome father with his head of thick black hair, leaning against a glider in some forgotten meadow, on some forgotten festival Sunday afternoon. All the emotion, all the passion, I want so badly to convey but can’t . . . simply can’t.

• August 11, 1983. In the rather dirty outside rearview mirror of our car, parked in Hopewell, three teen-age boys seen at a distance of, say, twenty? thirty? feet—I feel a tug of envy for their lives or do I mean their bodies—which they inhabit without question or speculation or dismay or dread—easy, effortless. It’s a queer long moment, minutes probably, while Ray is in a nearby store. The thought of slipping into another body, acquiring another life, not in fictional terms (that is, wanting more experiences, other angles of vision, etc.) but in sheerly physical terms (wanting more life & that ease in life).

• February 15, 1984. Bemused, yesterday, to be looking back through the earliest pages of this journal. So many thoughts; haphazard, “sincere” enough, yet to what purpose? To the purpose of thinking and recording and moving on? *Is* this life? (This is life, “nor am I out of it.”) ◆

FICTION

IN THE BEGINNING

BY IAN McEWAN

I ARRIVED ten minutes late. The place was doing good lunchtime business. Conversation was at a roar, and stepping in from the street was like walking into a storm. You could imagine a single topic—an hour later, there would be. The Professor was already seated, but Clarissa was on her feet, and I knew from across the room that she was in the mood for a fuss. A waiter was on his knees, praying style, wedging a table leg. Another was arranging a cushion on her chair to bring her up to height. When she saw me, she came skipping through the din and took my hand and led me to the table as though I were blind. If only. I associated these skittish impersonations of a child with celebration—and mayhem. And we had some cause to raise a glass. Professor Jocelyn Kale, Clarissa's godfather, had been appointed to an honorary position on the Human Genome Project. Clarissa had delivered her book the week before. I had just come from recording the last of my lectures. Three had been broadcast. Above all, it was Clarissa's birthday.

Before I sat down, I kissed her. Our tongues touched. Jocelyn half rose from his seat and shook my hand. At the same moment, champagne in an ice bucket was brought to the table, and we pitched our voices in with the roar. The ice bucket sat within a rhomboid of sunlight on the white tablecloth. The tall restaurant windows showed off rectangles of blue sky between the buildings. I had a hard-on from the kiss. In memory, it was all success, clarity, clatter. In memory, all the food they brought us first was red: the bresaola, the fat tongues of roasted peppers laid on goat's cheese, the radicchio, the white china bowl of radish coronets. When I think how we leaned in and shouted, I seem to be remembering an underwater event.

Jocelyn took from his pocket a small parcel done up in blue tissue. We drew down an imaginary silence on our table while Clarissa unwrapped it. Perhaps that was when I glanced to my left, at the table next to ours. A man, whose name I now know was Colin Tapp, was with his daughter and his father. Perhaps I noticed them later. Inside the tissue was a black box. Inside the box, on a cumulus of cotton wool, was a golden brooch. Still without speaking, Clarissa lifted it out, and we examined it on her palm.

Two gold bands were entwined in a double helix. Crossing between them were tiny silver rungs in groups of three, representing the base pairs—the four-letter alphabet that coded, in permutating triplets, all living things. Engraved on the helical bands were spherical designs, to suggest the twenty amino acids onto which the three-letter codons were mapped. In the full light gathered from the tabletop, it looked in Clarissa's hand like more than a representation. It could have been the thing itself, ready to cook up chains of amino acids which would be blended into protein molecules. It could have divided right there in her hand to make another gift. When Clarissa sighed Jocelyn's name, the sound of the restaurant surged back on us.

"Oh God, it's beautiful," she said and kissed him.

His weak yellow-blue eyes were moist. He said, "It was Gillian's, you know. She would have loved you to have it."

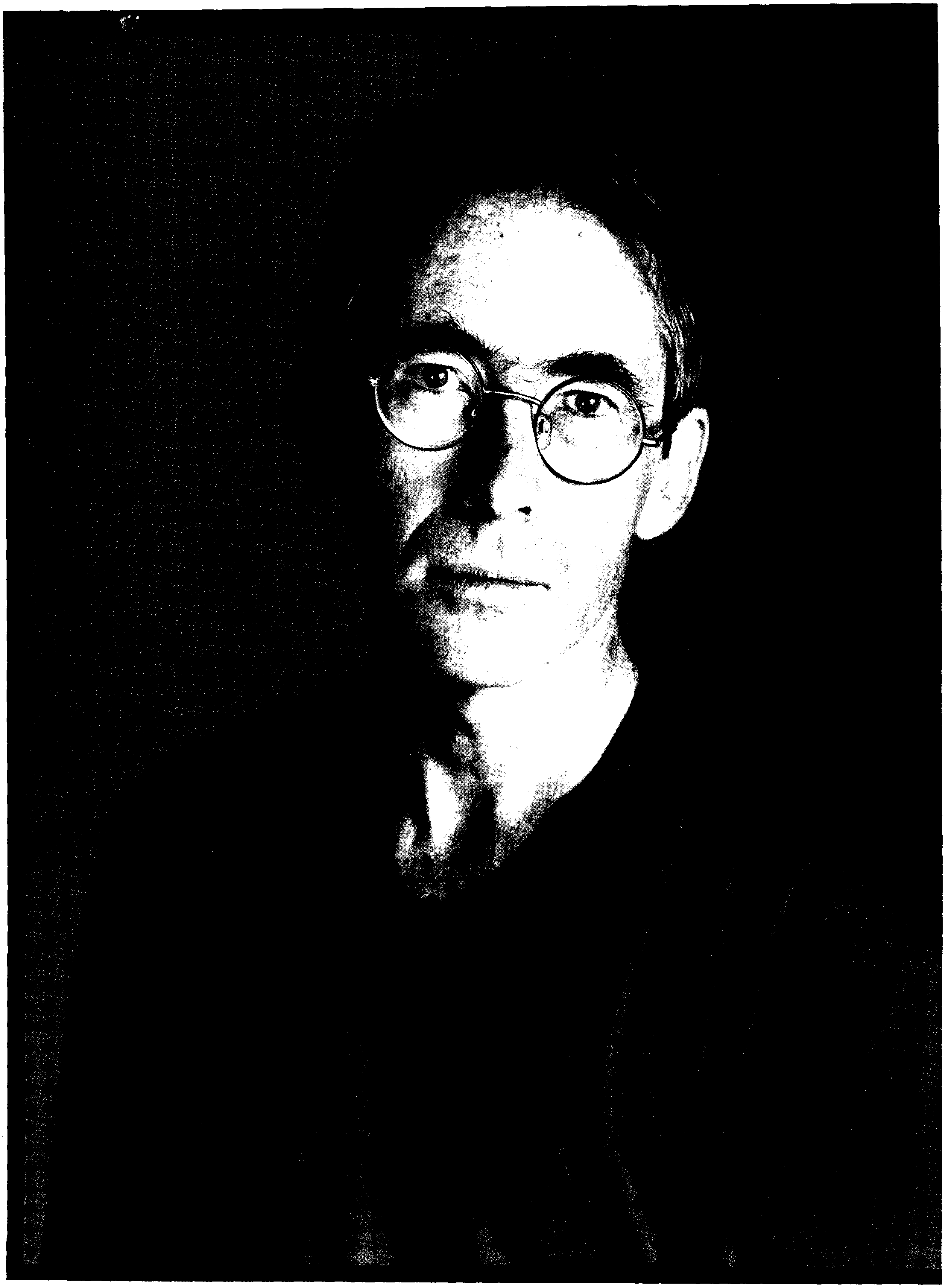
I was impatient to produce my own present, but we were still in the spell of Jocelyn's. Clarissa pinned the brooch on her gray silk blouse.

Would I remember the conversation now if I did not know what it preceded?

We began by joking that the Genome Project gave away such brooches by the dozen. Then Jocelyn talked about the discovery of DNA. Perhaps that was when I turned in my seat to ask a waiter to bring us water and noticed the two men and the girl. We emptied the champagne, and the antipasto was cleared away. I don't remember what food we ordered after that. Jocelyn began to tell us about Johann Friedrich Miescher, the Swiss chemist who identified DNA, in 1869. This was supposed to be one of the great missed chances in the history of science. Miescher had got himself a steady supply of pus-soaked bandages from a local hospital. (Rich in white blood cells, Jocelyn added for Clarissa's benefit.) Miescher was interested in the chemistry of the cell nucleus. In the nuclei he found phosphorous—an improbable substance, which didn't sit with current ideas. An extraordinary find, but his paper was blocked by his teacher, who spent two years repeating and confirming his student's results.

It was not boredom that let my attention shift, though I knew the Miescher story. It was pleasure. I was pleased with my last lecture, and I'd ridden out the fuss generated by the first three. My *tour d'horizon* of a hundred thousand religions—Neanderthal funerary rites to the leadership cults of certain socialist republics—had dismayed some by its evenhandedness. But anger rose against my assertion that, since religious practice was universal to all known societies, it must have a genetic base and therefore be the product of evolutionary pressure. I invoked E. O. Wilson: "Religions, like all other human institutions, evolve so as to enhance the persistence and influence of their practitioners." The bishops' anathemas, the millennial disgust of politicians and New Agers, a cranky death threat down the phone, the wounded letters to the press demonstrated that we do not live in a secular age. The death threat—a man's voice perhaps, pretending to be a woman's—simply informed me that a congregation had paid for the hire of my killer. Briefly, I was demonized; I had my fifteen minutes. Then the public mind, like that of some giant, squalling baby, was distracted by a newer, brighter thing. I had survived.

I looked around. At the next table, the girl was being helped through the menu by her father. Like me, he had to slide his glasses down his nose to see the



Ian McEwan, photographed by Richard Avedon in New York City, June 5, 1995.

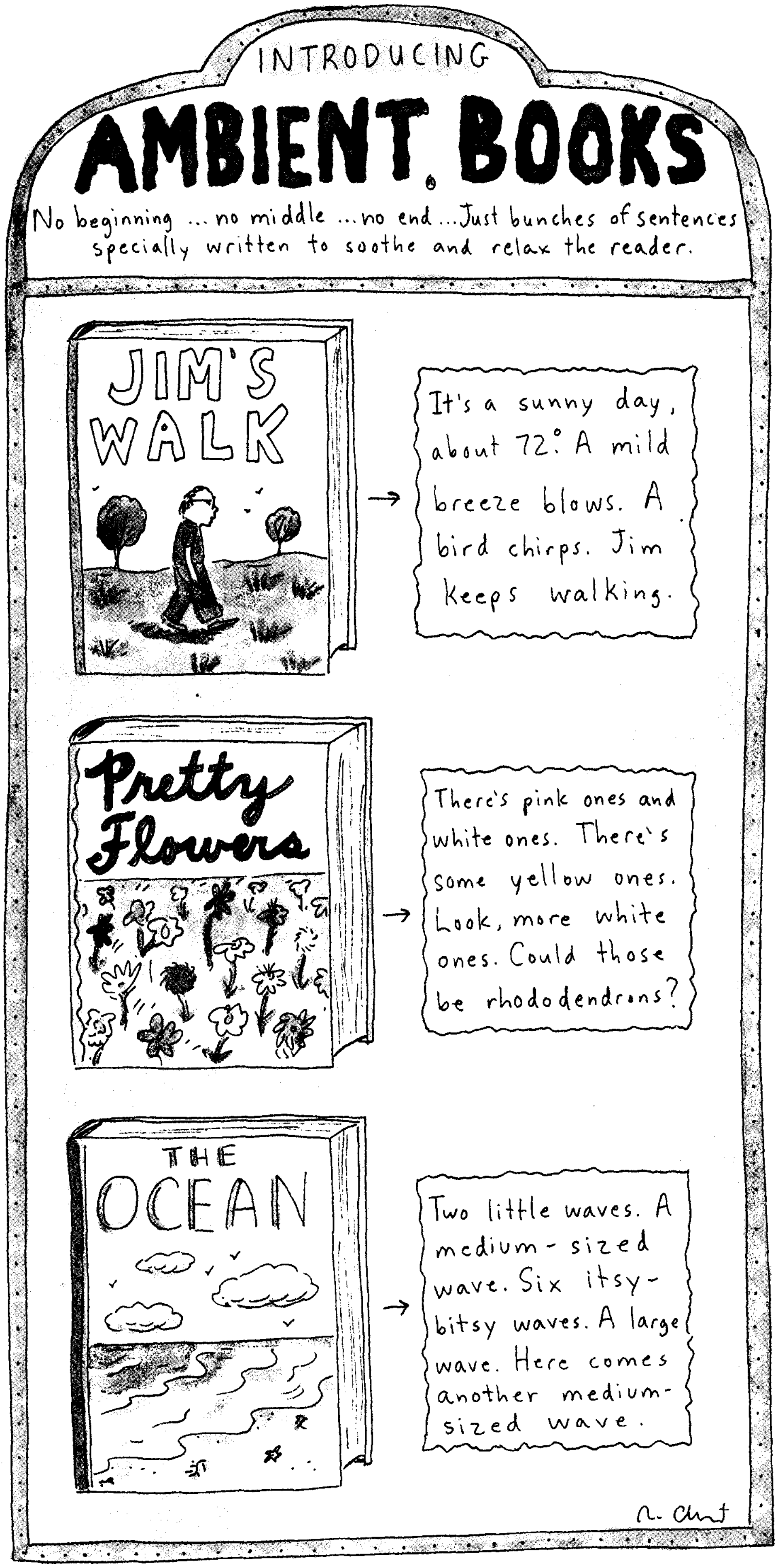
print. The girl leaned fondly against his arm. Would I ever have a child? Was it too late?

MEANWHILE, Jocelyn, enjoying the triple privilege of age, eminence, and the bestower of a gift, told his story. Miescher pressed on. He assembled a team and set about working out the chemistry of what he called "nucleic acid." Then he found them, the substances that made up the four-letter alphabet in whose language all life is written—adenine and cytosine, guanine and thymine. But it meant nothing. And that was odd, especially as the years went by. Mendel's work on the laws of inheritance had been generally accepted. Chromosomes had been identified in the cell nucleus and were suspected of being the location of genetic information. Now, thanks to Miescher, it was *known that* DNA *was in the chromosomes*, and he had described its chemistry. In 1892, in a letter to his uncle, he had speculated that DNA might code for life, just as an alphabet codes for language and concepts.

"It was staring them in the face," Jocelyn said. "But they couldn't see, they wouldn't see. The problem, of course, was the chemists. . . ."

It was hard work, talking against the din. We waited while he drank his water. The story was for Clarissa, an embellishment on her present. While Jocelyn was resting his voice, there was movement behind me. I was obliged to pull in my chair to let the girl through. She went off in the direction of the lavatories. When I was next aware of her she was back in her seat.

"The chemists, you see. Very powerful, rather grand. The nineteenth had been a good century for them. They had authority, but they were a crusty lot. Take Phoebus Levene at the Rockefeller Institute. He was absolutely certain that DNA was a boring, irrelevant molecule containing random sequences of those four letters, A, C, G, and T. He dismissed it, and then, in that peculiar human way, this became a matter of faith with him, deep faith. What he knew, he knew, and the molecule was insignificant. None of the younger chaps could get round him. It had to wait for years, until Griffiths's work on bacteria, in the twenties. Which Oswald Avery picked up in New York—Levene was old by


INTRODUCING
AMBIENT BOOKS®
No beginning ... no middle ... no end ... Just bunches of sentences specially written to soothe and relax the reader.
JIM'S WALK
→
It's a sunny day, about 72°. A mild breeze blows. A bird chirps. Jim keeps walking.
Pretty Flowers
→
There's pink ones and white ones. There's some yellow ones. Look, more white ones. Could those be rhododendrons?
THE OCEAN
→
Two little waves. A medium-sized wave. Six itsy-bitsy waves. A large wave. Here comes another medium-sized wave.
R. Chast

then, of course. Oswald's work took forever, right up into the forties. Then Alexander Todd, working in Cambridge on the sugar-phosphate links; then in '52 and '53 Maurice Wilkins and Rosalind Franklin; and then Crick and Watson. You know what poor Rosalind said when they showed her the model they had built of the DNA molecule? She said it was simply too beautiful not to be true."

The accelerated roll call of names and his old chestnut—beauty in science—slowed Jocelyn into speechless reminiscence. He fumbled with his napkin. He was eighty-two. As student or colleague, he had known them all. And Gillian had worked with Crick, after the first great breakthrough, on adaptor molecules. Gillian, like Franklin herself, had died of leukemia.

I was a second or two slow on the uptake, but Jocelyn had lobbed me an excellent cue. I reached under my chair and could not resist the chocolate-box lines: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty. . . ." Clarissa smiled. She must have guessed that after all her labor and triumph she might be getting Keats, but she could not have dreamed of what was now in her hands, in plain brown paper. Even before the wrapping was off she recognized it and squealed. The girl at the next table turned in her seat to stare, until her father tapped her on the arm. Foolscap octavo in drab boards with back label. Condition—poor, foxed, slight water damage. A first edition of his first collection, "Poems," of 1817.

"What presents!" Clarissa said. She stood and put her arms around my neck. "It must have cost you thousands." Then she put her lips to my ear. "You're a bad boy to spend so much money. I'm going to make you fuck me all afternoon."

"Oh, all right," I said. "If it'll make you feel better."

It is a temptation to invent or embellish details about the table next to ours, to force memory to deliver what was never captured. But I did see the man, Colin Tapp, put his hand on his father's arm as he spoke, reassuring him, soothing him. It is also difficult to disentangle what I discovered later from what I sensed at the time. Tapp was in fact two years older than me, his daughter was twelve, and his father seventy-three. I did nothing so deliberate as speculate about their ages. By now my attention was not wandering—our own table was absorbing, we were having fun. But I must have assumed a good deal about the relationships of our neighbors, and done it barely consciously—out of the corner of my eye, wordlessly, in the preverbal language of instant thought that linguists call "mentalese." The prepubescent girl I did take in, however glancingly. She had that straight-backed poise some children adopt, self-possession attempting worldliness and disarmingly revealing its opposite. Her skin was dark, her black hair was cut in a bob, and the skin on her neck was paler than the rest—the haircut was recent. Or were these details I observed later, in the chaos, or in the time after the chaos?

At our table, Clarissa had resumed her seat, and the conversation concerned young men put down or otherwise blocked by older men—their fathers, teachers, mentors, or idols. The starting point had been Miescher and his teacher, Hopper Seyler, who had held up publication of his student's discovery of phosphorous in cell nuclei. Seyler also happened to be the editor of the journal to which Miescher's papers had been submitted. From there—and I've had time to trace our conversation backward—from Miescher and Seyler, we arrived at Keats and Wordsworth.

Clarissa was our main source now, although outside his subject Jocelyn knew a little about most things, and he knew the famous story of the young Keats going to visit the poet he revered. I knew of the visit from Clarissa's researches. In late 1817, Keats had been staying at an inn, the Fox & Hounds, by Box Hill on the North Downs, where he finished his long poem "Endymion." He stayed on for a week and walked the downs in a daze of contentment. He was just twenty-two, he had written a long, serious, beautiful poem about being in love, and by the time he returned to London he was feeling high. There he heard the news and rejoiced: his hero, William Wordsworth, was in town. Keats had already sent his "Poems," with the inscription "To W. Wordsworth with the Author's sincere Reverence." (That would have been the one to give Clarissa. It's in the Princeton University Library; there are many uncut pages.) Keats had grown up on Wordsworth's poetry. He called "The Excursion" one of the "three things to rejoice at in this Age." He had taken from Wordsworth the idea of poetry as a sacred vocation, the most noble endeavor. Now he persuaded his painter friend Benjamin Robert Haydon to arrange a meeting. They set out together from Haydon's studio at Lisson Grove to walk to Queen Ann Street and call on the great genius. In his journal, Haydon noted that Keats expressed "the greatest, the purest, the most unalloyed pleasure at the prospect."

Wordsworth was a notorious grouch at that stage of his life—he was forty-seven—but he was friendly enough to Keats, and after a few minutes of small talk asked him what he'd been working on. Haydon jumped in and answered for him, and begged Keats to repeat the ode to Pan from "Endymion." So Keats walked up and down in front of the great man, reciting in "his usual half-chant, (most touching). . . ."

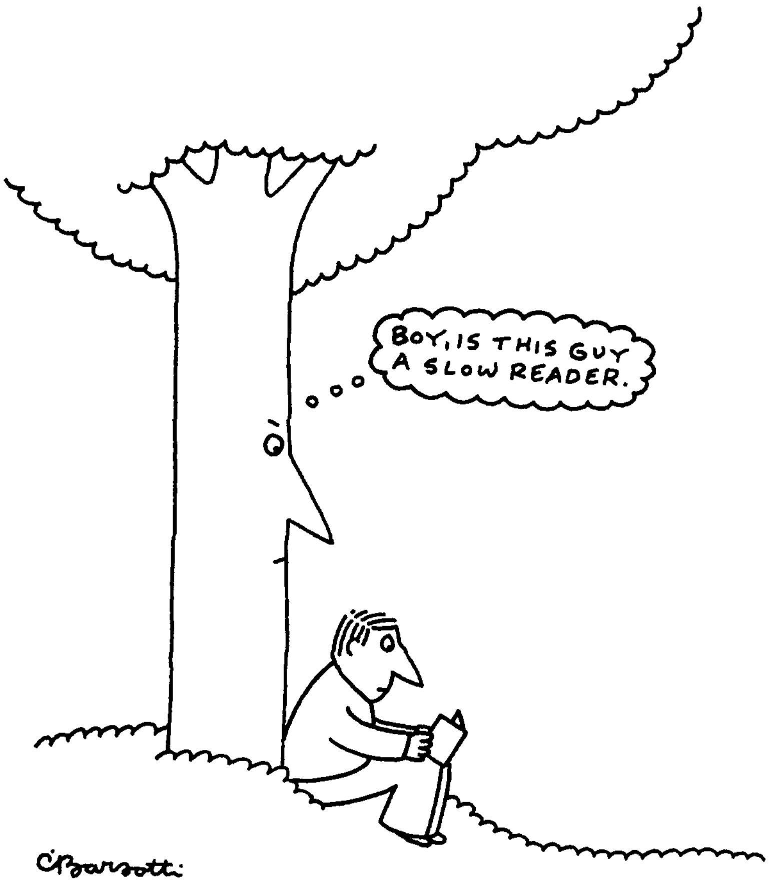
It was at this point in the story that Clarissa fought the restaurant clamor and quoted:

Be still the unimaginable lodge
For solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain.

And when the passionate young man was done, Wordsworth delivered into the silence his dryly dismissive verdict: "a Very pretty piece of Paganism"—which, according to Haydon, was "unfeeling and unworthy of his high Genius to a young Worshipper like Keats, and Keats felt it *deeply*," and never forgave him.

"But do we trust this story?" Jocelyn said. "Didn't I read somewhere that we shouldn't?"

"We don't." Clarissa counted off the reasons. Haydon wrote his account thirty years later, not long before he went completely mad. He wanted to get at Leigh Hunt, who was putting about his own version of the meeting even though he hadn't been there. By then Haydon also had a grudge against Wordsworth for not lending him


BOY, IS THIS GUY A SLOW READER.
CBarsotti

money. Haydon didn't mention the story in the diary he kept at the time. Nor did Wordsworth. Keats made no reference to it in his letters, and a couple of weeks later he was reciting his poetry in front of Wordsworth again and eating dinner with him. And how much of an insult was it really? In those days, “pretty” retained the meanings of clever, or skillful, or well-turned. Dorothy wrote, in 1803, about her brother's use of the word getting him into trouble in Scotland.

If I had stood up while Clarissa was telling us this and turned toward the entrance, I would have seen, across half an acre of talking heads, two figures come in and talk to the maître d'. One of the men was tall, but I don't think I took that in. I knew it later, but a trick of memory has given me the image as if I had stood up then: the crowded room, the tall man, the maître d' nodding and gesturing vaguely in our direction. And then what, in fantasy, could I have done to persuade Clarissa and Jocelyn and the strangers at the next table to leave their meals and run with me up the stairs to find, by interconnecting doors, a way down into the street? On a score of sleepless nights I've been back to plead with them to leave. Look, you don't know me, but I know what is about to happen. I'm from a future tainted by grief. It was a mistake, it doesn't have to happen. We could choose another outcome. Put down your knives and forks and follow me, quick! No, really, please trust me. Just trust me. Let's go!

But they do not see or hear me. They go on eating and talking. And so did I.

I SAID, “But the story lives on. The famous put-down.”

“Yes,” Jocelyn said eagerly. “It isn't true, but we need it. A kind of myth.”

We looked at Clarissa. I may have given the impression that she was the lecturing type, like those academic friends whose conversational style has been corrupted by years of teaching. But she wasn't like that. She may have been crazy now and then, playing tricks with her size, but she wasn't dull. She was reticent about what she knew really well. I once went down on drunken knees at a beach party to get her to recite “La Belle Dame sans Merci” from memory. But today we were celebrating; we were celebrating her, her birthday, her book, and the things she knew.

“It isn't true, but it tells the truth. Wordsworth was arrogant to the point of being loathsome about other writers. Gittings has a good line about his being in the difficult second half of a man's forties. When he got to fifty, he calmed down, brightened up, and everyone around him breathed. A year later, Keats was dead. There's always something delicious about young genius spurned by the powerful. You know, like The Man Who Turned Down the Beatles for Decca. We know that God, in the form of history, will have his revenge. . . .”

The two men were probably making their way between the tables toward us by then. I'm not sure. I have excavated that last half minute and I know two things for sure. One was that the waiter brought us sorbets. The other was that I slipped into a daydream. I often do. Almost by definition, daydreams leave no trace—they really do dodge conception to the very bourne of heaven, then leave the naked brain. But I've been back so many times, and I've retrieved it by remembering what triggered it: Clarissa's *A year later, Keats was dead.*

The words, the memento mori, floated me off. I was briefly gone. I saw them together, Wordsworth, Haydon, and Keats, in a room in Monkhouse's place on Queen Ann Street, and imagined the sum of their every sensation and thought, and all the stuff—the feel of clothes, the creak of chairs and floorboards, the resonance in their chests of their own voices, the little heat of reputation, the fit of their toes in their shoes and the things in their pockets, the separate assumptions about their recent pasts and what they would be doing next, the growing, tottering frame they each carried of where they were in the story of their lives—all this as luminously self-evident as this roaring restaurant, and all *gone.*

What takes a minute to describe took two seconds to experience. I returned, and compensated for my absence by telling a genius-spurned story. A retired-publisher friend had told me that back in the fifties he had turned down a novel called “Strangers from Within.” (By then, the visitors must have been ten feet away, right behind our table. I don't think they even saw us.) The point about my friend was that he only discovered his error thirty years later when an old file turned up at the place where he used to work. He hadn't remembered the name on the typescript—he was reading dozens every month—and he did not read the book when it finally appeared. Or at least not at first. The author, William Golding, had renamed it "Lord of the Flies" and had excised the long, boring first chapter that had put my friend off.

I think I was about to draw my resounding conclusion—that time protects us from our worst mistakes—but Clarissa and Jocelyn were not listening. I too had been aware of movement to one side. Now I followed their sight lines and turned. The two men who had stopped by the table next to ours seemed to have suffered burns to the face. Their skin was a lifeless, prosthetic pink, the color of dolls, or of medical plasters—the color of no one's skin. They shared a robotic nullity of expression. Later, we learned about the latex masks, but at the time these men were a shocking sight, even before they acted. The arrival of the waiter with our desserts in stainless-steel bowls was temporarily soothing. Both men wore black coats that gave them a priestly look. There was ceremony in their stillness. The flavor of my sorbet was lime, just to the green side of white. I already had a spoon in my hand but I hadn't used it. Our table was staring shamelessly.

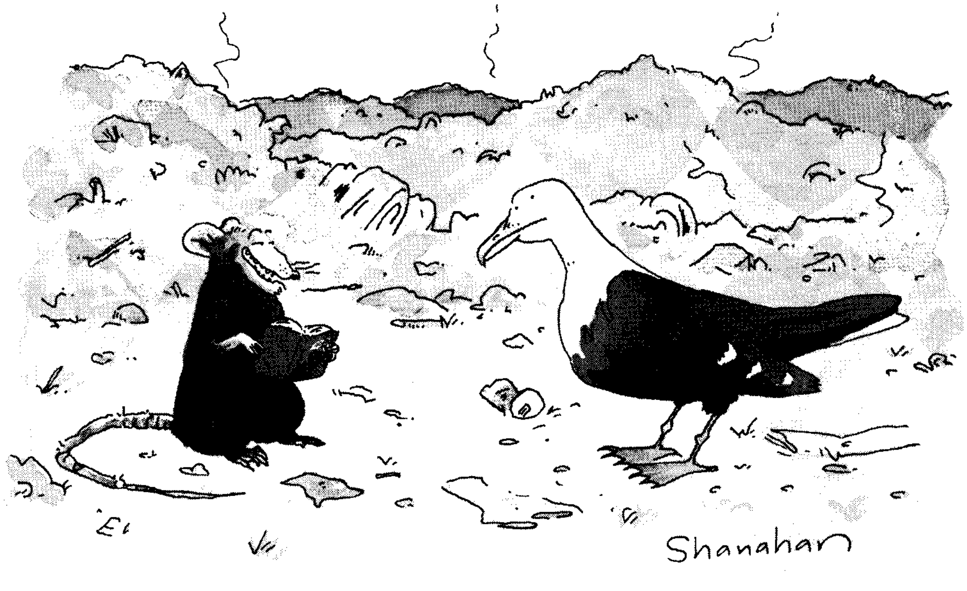
The intruders simply stood and looked down at our neighbors, who in turn looked back, puzzled, waiting. The young girl looked to her father and then back to the men. The older man put down his empty fork and seemed about to speak, but he said nothing. A variety of possibilities unspooled before me at speed: a student stunt; venders; that the man, Colin Tapp, was a doctor or a lawyer, and these were his patients or clients; some new version of the kissogram; crazy members of the family come to embarrass. Around us the lunchtime uproar, which had dipped locally, was back to level. When the taller man drew from his coat a black stick, a wand, I inclined to the kissogram. But who was his companion, now slowly turning to survey the room? He missed our table, it was so close. His eyes, piglike in the artificial skin, never met mine. The tall man, ready to cast his spell, pointed his wand at Colin Tapp.

And Tapp himself was suddenly a second ahead of us all. His face showed what we didn't understand about the spell. His puzzlement, congealed in terror, could not find a word to tell us, because there was no time. The bullet struck through his white shirt at his heart. He was lifted from his chair and smacked against the wall and thrown back down to catch another in the throat. The first high-velocity impact forced a fine spray, a blood mist, across our tablecloth, our desserts, our hands, our sight. My first impulse was simple and self-protective: I did not believe what I was seeing. Clichés are rooted in truth: I did not believe my eyes. Tapp flopped forward across the table. His father did not move, not a muscle in his face moved. As for his daughter, she did the only possible thing—she passed out. Her mind closed down on this atrocity. She slipped sideways in her chair toward Jocelyn, who put out a hand—the instincts of an old sportsman—and, though he could not prevent her fall, he caught her upper arm and saved her head from a bang.

Apart from that, we could not move. Or speak. And the men? They walked away. The tall one tucked the gun and silencer into his coat as he went. They moved swiftly toward the entrance. Only two tables had witnessed the event. There may have been a scream, and then, for seconds on end, paralysis. Further off, no one heard a thing. The chatter, the chink of cutlery against plates, went stupidly on.

Then I looked at Clarissa. Her face was horribly rouged. She mouthed a single word at me which I did not catch, and if I had I would not have understood its significance. She was looking at me, communicating with a kind of pulsing, pleading silence, pushing me toward a simple fact. And then I got it, it came to me without effort, in the same neural flash of preverbal thought that comprehends relation and structure all at once, that knows the connection between things better than the things themselves. The unimaginable lodge. Our two tables—their composition, the numbers, the sexes, Clarissa's size, our relative ages, my glasses . . .

But I felt nothing. This was in the time before the invention of feeling, before the division of thought, before the panic and the guilt and all the choices. So we sat there, hopeless in shock, while around us the uproar subsided and understanding spread concentrically outward from our silence. Two waiters were hurrying toward us, their faces loopily amazed, and it was only when they reached us, and we began to talk, to blabber, that I learned that Clarissa's word was "telephone." The congregation had wasted its money on the wrong man. ♦



"It's deliciously trashy."

LETTERS

TO A YOUNG WRITER

When Paul Theroux was in his early twenties, he went to Africa with the Peace Corps rather than to Vietnam. In 1966, while teaching in Uganda, he found a mentor, fellow-traveller, and lifelong correspondent in V. S. Naipaul.

BY V. S. NAIPAUL

In the summer of 1966, Naipaul travelled through Tanzania, leaving Theroux in Kampala, where he was teaching English at Makerere University College, and working on his second novel and a nonfiction book about Africa, to be called "Notes for a Curfew."

Dar es Salaam
July 23, 1966

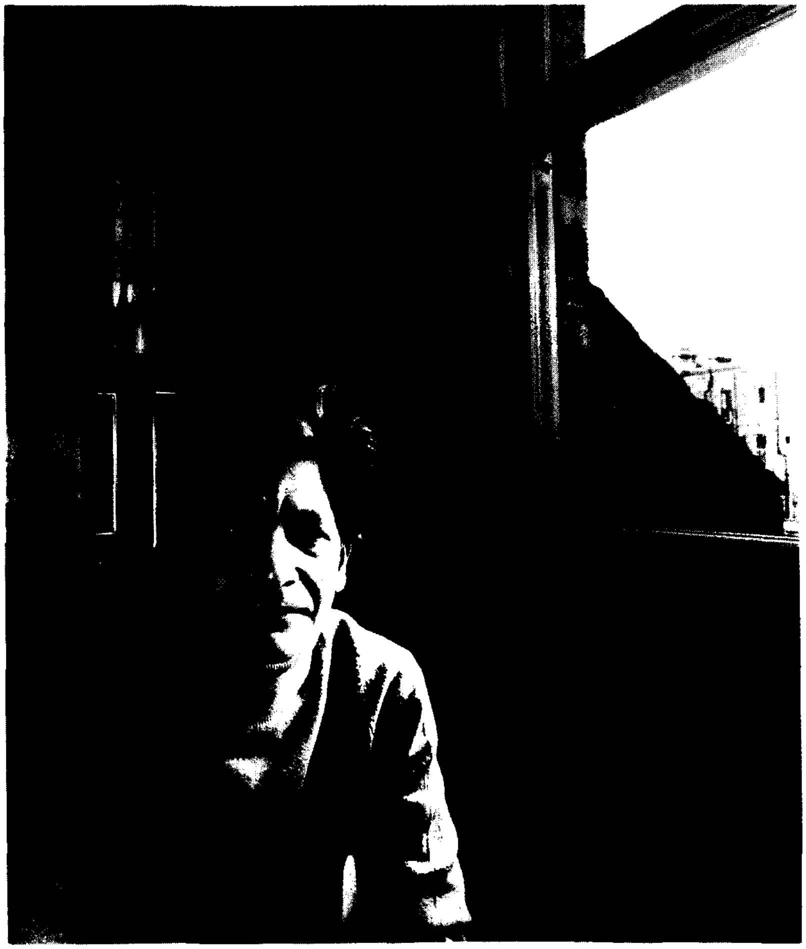
DEAR PAUL:

How quickly you work. It takes me months before emotion turns to thought. But I am old and slow. Would you like to send your book here? Or would you prefer to wait until I get back to Kampie? I get back on the 15th or thereabouts of August. I leave it to you. But please please please: before you send by post make sure you have another copy. Even a thermofax one. I will accept only on this condition. If I like it of course I will do what I can to find a publisher for you. But it is time you settled down: with an agent or a publisher. English publishers are different from American: an English publisher is interested in a *writer*, not in a *book*. You see the difference. I will get you an agent too in London if you are interested. But this flitting about from firm to firm is not good for you. I should forget Longman and Heinemann; they are both now in the printed paper rather than publishing business. There is the liberalism of buggery and the liberalism of commerce.

Talking about buggery. Fairly extensive here. But not interracial. I was told this by an American called Shaw who, I believe, knows you. A man with a beard and a Dutch wife.

VIDIA

That same year, Naipaul and Theroux took a trip to Rwanda together, and Naipaul noticed that Theroux was a religious journal keeper.



V. S. Naipaul in London, 1976. "The essence of the freelance life is freedom."

BILL BRANDT © J.P. KERNOT

London
September 30, 1966

MY DEAR PAUL:

This is the first time since I have got back that I have sat down to the machine. It feels so strange and solid and heavy after the lightweight Olivetti. An odd thing about this return: I am still not drinking, but at the end of every day I feel drunk and every morning I wake up feeling that I drank a lot the evening before.

East Africa seems very far away and shabby and unimportant, dangerous in some ways for the thinking person. But I don't wish to go over old ground.

I have been thinking a lot about you and your journal; and the point I wanted to make was that a writer isn't a writer because things happen around him. Really that is only a form of anthologising and the writer is someone who does a bit more for us. I think you understand.

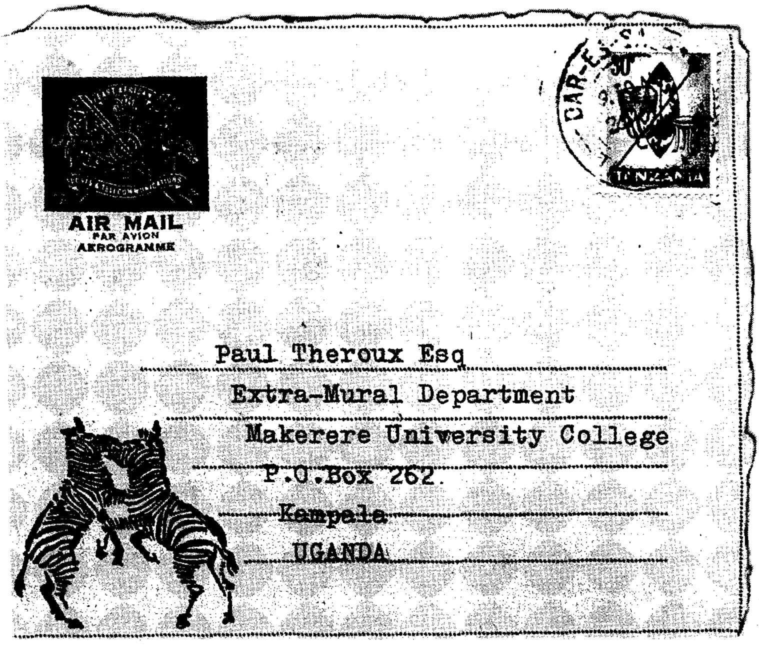
VIDIA

The manuscript of "Notes for a Curfew" was rejected by an editor at Andre Deutsch.

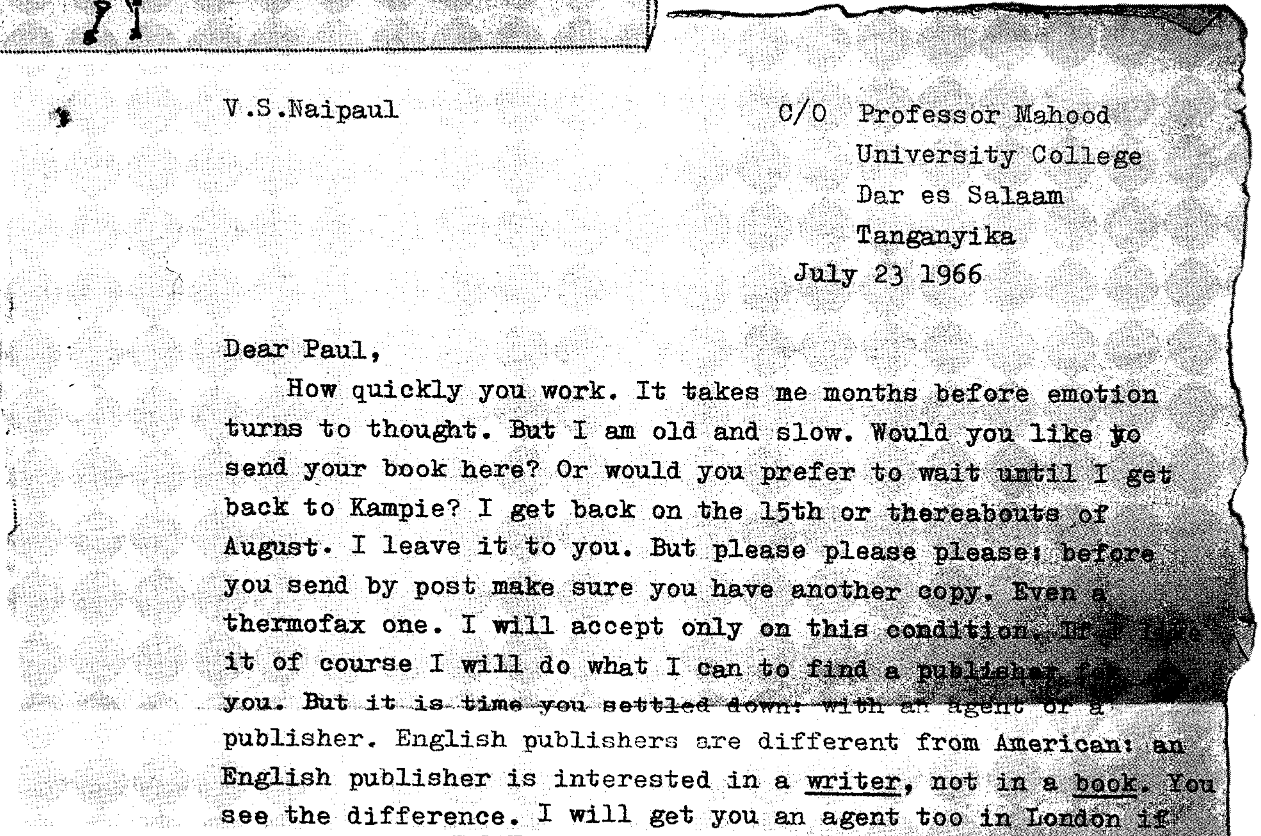
Bristol Hotel
Beirut
February 21, 1967

DEAR PAUL:

I don't think you ought to worry about Diana Athill's reasons for rejecting your


AIR MAIL
PAR AVION
AEROGRAMME
DAR-ES-SALAAM
TANZANIA

Paul Theroux Esq
Extra-Mural Department
Makerere University College
P.O.Box 262.
Kampala
UGANDA



V.S.Naipaul

C/O Professor Mahood
University College
Dar es Salaam
Tanganyika
July 23 1966

Dear Paul,

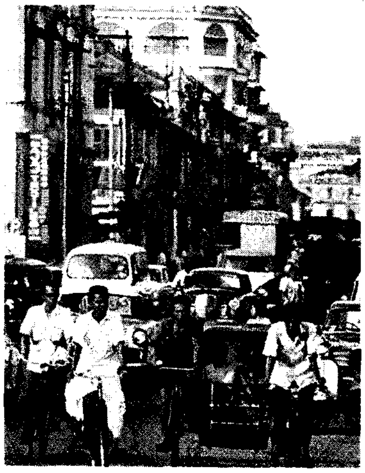
How quickly you work. It takes me months before emotion turns to thought. But I am old and slow. Would you like to send your book here? Or would you prefer to wait until I get back to Kampie? I get back on the 15th or thereabouts of August. I leave it to you. But please please please: before you send by post make sure you have another copy. Even a thermofax one. I will accept only on this condition. If I like it of course I will do what I can to find a publisher for you. But it is time you settled down: with an agent or a publisher. English publishers are different from American: an English publisher is interested in a writer, not in a book. You see the difference. I will get you an agent too in London if

g about from firm to firm

Longman and Heinemann;

er rather than publish

Theroux photographed by Naipaul in Rwanda, 1966 (top); scenes of Singapore, where Theroux moved in 1968.



LETTERS COURTESY PAUL THEROUX; TOP RIGHT: V.S. NAIPAUL, COURTESY OF PAUL THEROUX; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: THOMAS HOEPKER/MAGNUM PHOTOS INC.; WINFIELD PARKS/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION; JULES BUCHER/PHOTO RESEARCHERS INC.

MS. She gave the correct ones; and, as she said, someone might easily come along and prove her wrong. It might happen, indeed, before you get this letter. I feel that in this matter of discovering where one's talent lies the fight is so private that any intrusion is an impertinence; I don't intend to give any more advice; I have said enough. Is it disorder that you have been observing in Africa, or are you throwing back one of my words at me? Disorder is the last word I would have used myself; but then language can be very private. I am glad you have got on to Martial at last; he is a delicious writer and brings Rome back more vividly than others. But he is hardly someone from whom one could generalise about the word Latin, as you very swiftly did. The issue is somewhat more complex.

I am happy that your journalistic ventures thrive. As you say, you are usually very lucky—when a door shuts, a window opens—and I am sure that you will soon find your way. [Tanzanian President] Nyerere's nationalisation, by the way, has been greeted with amusement at this end. Do you think Sir Chichester will make it round Cape Horn? I hope he drowns. If he doesn't, he might be tempted to do the whole thing all over again.

Yours,
VIDIA

On September 15, 1967, Theroux, who was in Embu, Kenya, finishing his second novel, "Fong and the Indians," writes, "I wonder if you remember my mentioning, in a previous letter, a certain English girl. You said once you don't like suspense. Let me say, then, simply that I am marrying her in early December, in Kampala, before flying to London with her."

"How's this? 'Quoth the Raven, Nevermore, unquoth.' "

London
September 19, 1967

DEAR PAUL:

You have been on my mind for some time, and I was delighted to get your letter from Embu this morning with all your news. Many congratulations.

A place you might look at for a horror-interest is Denmark. We have just come back. Nobody starves; everybody lives in neat little houses. But nobody is rich; no one has the chance of aiming at physical luxury, and there is a corresponding depression of the mind. Everyone lives in his neat little cell, with his Danish furniture and his wonderful light fittings, without which things they would all go mad. To maintain their "standard of living" they have to impose very heavy taxes on themselves. So, cigarettes cost 7/6 for 20. Alcohol is so expensive that a new type of orgy has been devised. You take a "spirit boat" from any of the small ports and go out to international waters. There you stay for half an hour to about forty-five minutes and drink yourself silly. In the end the spirit boat and the concentrated drinking become the kick in itself. But the saddest expression of this solitude in which the Dane lives is the pornography. It is called, affectionately and officially, Porno. Your pin-up girl sits in the nude with her legs wide apart; there are other pictures simply of the vagina. Lesbian couples; queer boys, etc., etc. Every little village has its Porno shop; there are advertisements in the newspapers for Porno models—they prefer "pairs," in whatever permutations. To me now the very word "Scandinavian" is a horror word, full of ice and death and sullen coitus. I prefer vice myself, and like it to remain a little vicious.

Many congratulations on your engagement once more.

VIDIA

November 16, 1967

MY DEAR PAUL:

Delighted to hear about the second novel. I must read your African book this time. Question: does the book now, in its rewritten form, have a *still centre*, without which observations and views remain disintegrated? Every good book suggests that the writer, however painful his subject, has arrived at some inward peace about it, some inner resolution, even of anger and despair, even though this peace &

resolution is purely temporary. So that you know where a man stands. There is a grain of truth in the magazine editor's liking for the personality-writer. See you soon.

VIDIA

Are there any ivory cigarette holders in Uganda? Bring me one, please; or a bulky smooth yellow meerschaum.

On March 17, 1968, Theroux writes that he and his wife were caught up in a street protest in Kampala. They escaped to safety on the roof of a nearby building.

March 29, 1968

MY DEAR PAUL:

I am most grieved to hear about your trouble with that student demonstration. It is one of my own fears—this mass violence, and I think it awful that it should have happened to you and Anne. I am sure that you were braver and more sensible than I would have been. What were they demonstrating about? Rhodesia, Obote, England, or what? I do not think that any country that has to surrender judgment on any important issue to its masses can ever make a contribution. It is not only Africa now, I am afraid. The same sort of hysterical hand-to-mouth judgment of grave issues is taking place here; the results are not good. I don't know how countries are ever going to strike a balance between idealism and wisdom on one side and greed and folly on the other.

Another little blow on the Stock Exchange, about which I haven't yet told Pat [his wife]. I bought a clay company at 30/9; they instantly crashed to 25, and have just labored up, with the recent boom, to 27/6. On the other hand my cosmetics people are doing beautifully. I don't feel it's for me, though. I seldom lose money. But I never make it easily.

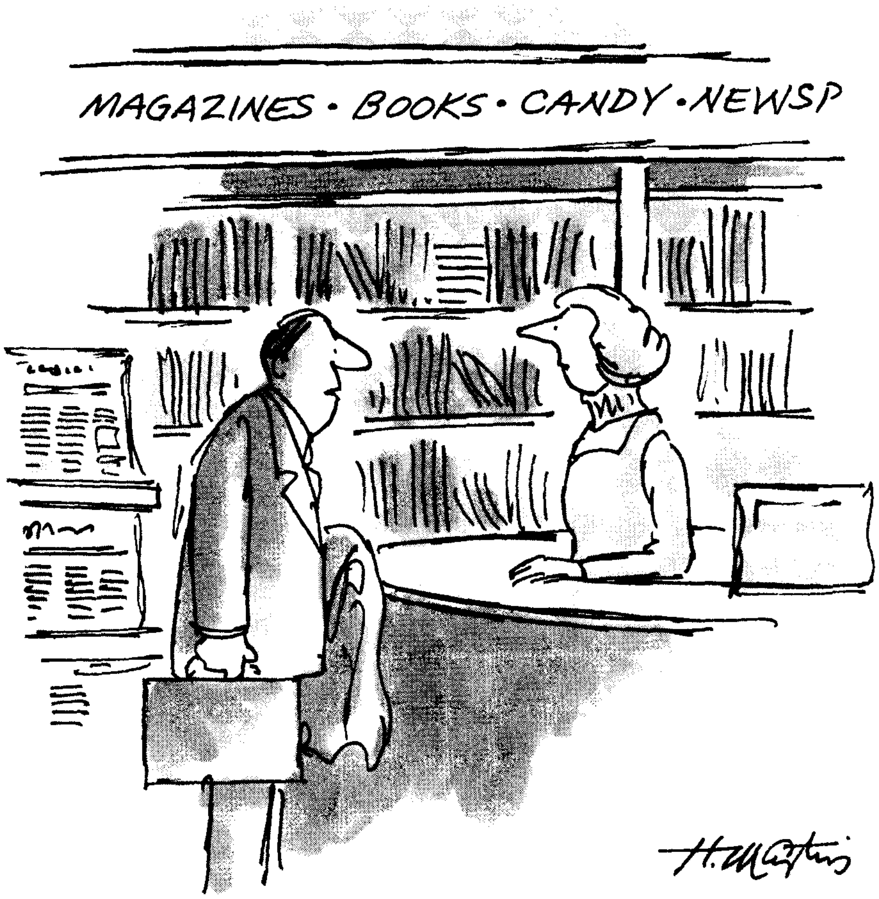
Love to you both,
VIDIA

June 8, 1968

MY DEAR PAUL:

I know few writers whose letters are as good as yours. I find them as nice as those of Scott Fitzgerald. I was reading a few of his the other evening and was greatly struck by them, especially those about writing which he wrote to his daughter. Writers in the end become obsessive about their art and quite intolerant; and I imagine the reason is that we all begin by wanting to be writers, by writing in the fashion of what we have read, by living up to an ideal of being a writer which, as we write more ourselves, we abandon; and then, perhaps not always when it is too late, we find that we have committed ourselves to something we didn't really understand. . . . I have begun to feel vaguely that all writing is an oddly Buddhistic-Hindu business of cancelling out what has gone before. It is the way the individual book gets written. Halfway through we are writing a different book from the one we began and then we have to go back and make the ends meet. Then the next book cancels out the previous book. And so on . . .

VIDIA



"I'm looking for a good LaGuardia-to-Logan-length thriller."

• •

On June 16, 1968, Theroux writes that he has quit his job in Kampala and will be going to teach in Singapore. And there were other developments: "Anne gave birth to a boy yesterday at Mulago. This is something of an achievement—not the birth, but that it was at Mulago and they both survived. I stayed for the whole thing; if you have never seen a birth, Vidia, you really should."

July 5, 1968

DEAR PAUL:

Many congratulations on the birth of your son.

I am glad you have given up Makerere; glad that you are going to Singapore, though I have, as you know, reservations about the means you have chosen. Jacobean literature? I didn't know this was a branch of the awful study. Perhaps you might get me out there as a visiting idler.

I have taken the liberty of giving your name, as a possible reviewer, to the Literary Editor of the *Times;* this might just conceivably give you a chance to do some good reviews for an English audience and establish your name in London.

Regards to you both,
VIDIA

On January 16, 1969, Theroux describes the many expatriates teaching at the University of Singapore, among them the poet *and novelist D. J. Enright, who was chairman of the English Department: "Enright is a very kind, generous man. His books are constantly remaindered in Singapore bookshops. He is good-natured about that and quotes many another remaindered author. He seems to believe in a kind of 'automatic writing'—you just sit down and bang! you're off . . . writing away."*

c /o Lowell
15 West 67th Street
New York
March 11, 1969

DEAR PAUL:

Many thanks for your letter. I was pretty interested in what you said of Singapore and Enright. I disagree with him profoundly, of course. There is no worse sort of literary pride than the pride of the remaindered; and I am writing from a city where, now, I have no reputation. It doesn't make me proud. It makes me feel an intruder. But I know that I could never develop the Russian obsessions of these Jewish-European intellectuals who just fasten on each other's critical writings and criticise themselves into nothing. News: Podhoretz is dead (of course in the literary sense) after his febrile butterfly life of the autumn. They are killing Trilling; Baldwin has lost; Bellow's lungs have collapsed; and Malamud is eating the sour grapes of Roth (Philip, whose latest obscene novel has apparently killed the Jewish-novel genre and has sold 200,000 copies before publication). As I say, not my scene. . . . I am staying for the moment in the studio of Robert Lowell, the only American who has read my work (in the English editions). The wine in this city is very good and cheap in the shops. Very cold and dry and sunny and splendid. I alternate between great happiness and great rage at the violence done to the American Indians: I feel the land very much as theirs at dusk, the sky high above Central Park.

VIDIA

Excelsior Hotel
New York
May 16, 1969

MY DEAR PAUL:

Your book ["Girls at Play"] came yesterday and was read at once. Many congratulations. I do feel it is very, very good. I haven't seen the London press, but I am sure you had good reviews, as I am sure there were some who would have found it too much to manage. I liked the cleanness of it; the simplicity and clarity of the narrative (nothing too elaborately mounted: things just happen or are happening). . . . But above all this is the work of a man who has come to a *resolution* about a particular experience (we have discussed this before). A poor word, but Mailer, say, doesn't have it. His work is a writer's self-display, a display of writing, a display of the self. Here you have gone beyond that to the true artist's detachment (which is *not* unconcern, far from it). I liked the prankishness, the comedy, the passion—so beautifully blended. Heather is superb and correct; a great bit of perception, so true and so tragically of a decaying England. Silly and not important to say what I felt was less successful, but still: the overdone prankishness of the Heather-Poole rivalry (too dominant where it occurs: as it is, I feel the mood slips for a little). And—but this is personal—confessions are too stagey in fiction. I think we could have known about Heather's mystery from the beginning. Still, you are now well on your way; though I fear that by dealing in subtleties and getting rid of the ego-display you are ruining your chances in the U.S. "market."

VIDIA

In a letter of December 18, 1969, Theroux proposes to write a book about Naipaul's work, asking, "Would it gripe you terribly?"

London
January 7, 1970

DEAR PAUL:

It has been a year of crisis for me, and the crisis relates in some ways, perhaps in all ways, to your letter about the book you say you want to write about my work. The crisis has been political—what passport, what country, where the area of welcome and calm, where the audience for my books, which deal with such private issues, what the value then of writing, etc., etc. The point of this being as follows: unless you try to understand my background you will misinterpret what I have written. Immigrant in the New World: fine, but there is no United States for me, no prospects in journalism, State Department, General Motors. No, one is a colonial as well, with all the spiritual and economic limitations and all the spiritual blight. My world must not be seen as a quainter version of the whole worlds that the person in England, France, the United States, Japan, takes for granted he will grow into. Unless you understand the destitution I have been writing about, which is total, you will misinterpret. Fantasy, illusion, make-believe: the critics are puzzled, but these have been the themes—without deliberation—of my work. You write the book first; then you live out the truth. Think of it like this: imagine the despair to which the barefoot colonial is reduced when, wanting to write, and reading the pattern books of Tolstoy, Balzac, et al., he looks at his own world and discovers that it almost doesn't exist. Hemingway? The barefoot colonial in Paris? Where the Hemingway adventure for him? Try to understand this and see the effort to make art out of this destitution and alienation (every object the colonial uses presupposes a totally different world from the one the colonial knows). The question—as tormenting to me this past year as the problem of where to buy a house, what physical area of the earth—is: Is this alienation, however honestly realised, enough for art? Has art resulted? Is it too private to be of value—not only as literature but also (to me important) in terms of sales? The other stipulation I will make is that you will be discreet in personal matters; I opened myself to you at various times without reserve, and sometimes with flippancy, which may not always be understood. The paper ends.

VIDIA

Gloucester
April 17, 1970

MY DEAR PAUL:

Many thanks for your very full letter from Penang. From this letter I thought that you were troubled about various things you didn't mention; but I feel that when you leave S'pore and are back once more in a world that's more intellectually congenial you will revive. But I may be wrong; perhaps you are perfectly all right! I speak as a non-parent, but I imagine you are delighted at the prospect of a second child.

Good news about your new book ["Jungle Lovers"]; you really are a worker. I look forward very much to reading that (but not before the end of June: I don't want to be unsettled by another writer's mood, tone, etc., while I am doing my own). And I look forward to your book about my books. I mean this as more than a courtesy: you must feel free to criticise, argue with, deplore, dismiss anything you want. You must give me the pleasure of seeing what I look like. It would be like hearing one's voice, seeing oneself walk down the street. You must feel free. I know, for instance, that I was once young; and that I have changed, lost and gained and sometimes strayed, as I have grown older. Show me!

Vidia

October 13, 1970

My dear Paul:

How nice to get your letter. It isn't easy for me to give you advice about places of residence, because our problems and needs are now so different, you with your family, and with your American burden. So within this context of uncertainty and doubt about the value of what I say, I would like to say first of all that it may be damaging for you to withdraw from the world and set up as a writer in the country, without a job, without links with the society where you live, at your age. Life appears very long; but no one does much creative work of a *new* sort after fifty; and the next twenty years are of great importance to you; and the life that appears so creatively and financially stable now may alter. I am concerned, too, about your choice of England. There is a certain mind-addling quality of public debate and public concern, national "withdrawal" in any event, in England at the moment which I feel is driving more and more writers into little sterile shells. The grotesque concept of the writer as a man above it all, not meddling in "politics" i.e. the world, is now, thank goodness, dead; the writer, more than anyone else, has to be in the world, if his work is to be of value. (Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the others, who were outside the world, are bad writers, for their inability to see beyond their careers as "writers." Twain is good and will remain so. But this is too big a subject.)

Again let me say this. I have been able to live in the country for the last ten months *only* because I have been actually doing a piece of work, which was already started. To have nothing on hand and to live in Gloucester or Salisbury would, I think, be quite insupportable. So it's only, literally, a writing-retreat (order, convenience, cheapness, silence, daily walks in fresh air: trips once a week to London) for me. I finished my book two days ago; I will finish the typing in a fortnight. Then I will have to get out of England, go somewhere, see the world again. But then of course I don't have a family.

Vidia

Amesbury, Wiltshire
May 26, 1971

My dear Paul:

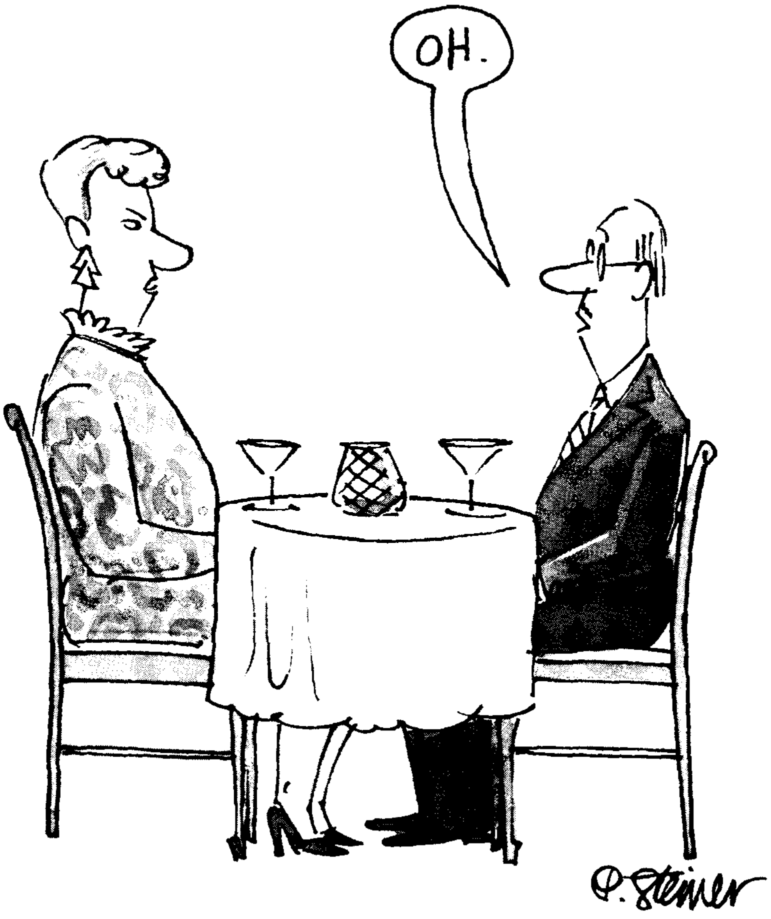
I have been properly on my feet only for the last week or so, after a severe six-week illness. Bronchitis and pneumonia. So the articles which I should have written by mid-April remain unwritten; and a setback like this means quite literally that for all the five months of this year I have earned *nothing*. A terrible intimation of age, failing powers, mortality. I suppose I fell ill because I have been deeply depressed these past two and a half years, after the mind-bending labour on El Dorado ["The Loss of El Dorado," published in 1969]; and that last year's writing—a great triumph of will, from my own point of view—has probably exhausted me for a long time to come. That is really what I feel now, just before my 39th birthday: a very deep fatigue and a great anxiety about the future.

My love to you & yours,
Vidia

June 14, 1971

My dear Paul:

What marvellous reviews! You already had a name in England and now "Jungle" takes you to the top. Many congratulations. An agonising profession, but days like yesterday are its rewards. It makes no difference that you are there while your book is being published here; and it is rather nice to have, as it were, a reputation to come back to, instead of appearing to be pushing the work. I'm very much against this "launching" business; I feel it's been overdone and is now, as they say, coun-



THE STORY OF OH

terproductive. I haven't read the book, but I intend to. I cannot tell you how much your success delights me.

I tried writing yesterday but was too overwhelmed by the events in Bengal [the civil war that resulted in the secession of East Pakistan], and all the letters I began tended to degenerate into anti-Islamic harangues. It is an awful business.

I have so far, by the way, got none of those stories you promised me. But perhaps that will wait now until you get back. I hope you will want to come over for the day. Lovely walks to Stonehenge and beside our unpolluted river; and not a soul in sight! Ridiculously Hardyesque. As we were walking to Stoners one day last week we actually ran into the sheep-shearing ceremony. The shearer, a seven-feet giant of a man, very Lawrentian. He makes his round once a year, and nowadays he comes in a battered motorcar. He's very much the top man, with the farmer's help doing the brute labour of dragging the sheep individually out of the pen and then lifting them on to their rumps, where they are more or less helpless. So the shearer has to bend—strain on the back—and he uses his legs and knees to keep the sheep in place—strain on the legs—and with his immense arms he has to keep the animal under control while shearing. The sweat poured, and of course because we were watching he went on and on, not stopping to rest. Sheep's fleeces are oily, did you know? The floor of the shearing shed became quite black and oily with wool-grease. A ritual about everything, about the way the shearing is done, about the way the fleece is wrapped up afterwards. So, many things survive, even in our polluted world. . . .

VIDIA

In the fall of 1971, Theroux and his family arrived in England and rented a house in Dorset.

Valsayn Park, Trinidad
February 3, 1972

MY DEAR PAUL:

I understand the dilemma you are in about the reviewing. You need to appear more often in the English papers, to broaden the base of your reputation; but they do pay appallingly. Couldn't you tell *Book World* to give you a rest until you finish your novel? Burgess was telling me some years ago, when he was doing 2 or

EDWARD STEEN, COURTESY OF V.S NAIPAUL

V. S. Naipaul in the Caribbean, 1983. "Unless you try to understand my background you will misinterpret what I have written."

3 reviews a week, that he was frightened to say no. (He was also frightened of taxi-drivers and tipped them extravagantly, preposterously.)

I am having the same problem with *The New York Review.* They are lovely people and I am very keen on Bob Silvers; and they will print anything I want to write about S. America. But they just can't afford to pay.

No adventure, no journeys yet. I am just queen-beeing it here at my sister's.

VIDIA

June 6, 1972

DEAR PAUL:

The essence of the freelance life is freedom. Idleness is part of freedom and shouldn't alarm you: you will find soon enough that you have more than enough on your plate. Relish these periods of rest. To be a freelance it is also necessary to believe, to know, to know profoundly, that one is going to be all right—however unlikely it seems at any particular distressing moment. This faith your friends cannot give you: it is something you have to discover in yourself. Though, from what you tell me, things don't seem particularly bad.

I came back from Argentina two days ago. Now I have to write my articles—one on the country, one on Borges. . . .

Creatively, I continue barren. Health and strength have returned. But I fear the future much more than you do: your work is ahead of you. At 40, I have the sickening sensation that my work is behind me. One begins to be intimidated by the sight of one's books; one hates being talked to about them; one begins to feel, in fact, something of a fraud. In this profession, is satisfaction ever attained? If I write again, though, I think it will be a new man writing.

I met a girl in Argentina. One day she copied out two pages from "The Return of the Native" to give to me. In those pages, the heroine reflects on the melancholy of her life and her situation: "The meanest kisses were at famine prices." How that chills: the shock of "famine" and "prices" after "kisses." And the heroine cries out: Send me some great love, or I shall die. So I feel now about love and writing. Send me some passion; send me some great funny idea; rid me of the past. Or I shall die, in my prime, when I know that my talent is at its peak.

See how this jolly letter has turned out. Strange things happen when a writer sits down on an off day to write to a friend.

My love to you all & my best wishes for the new house,

VIDIA

Amesbury, Wiltshire
September 18, 1972

MY DEAR PAUL:

I asked for a finished copy of your book ["V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work"] last week when I was in London; and I have been reading it with amazement, delight, and a great humility. It seems marvellously responsive and humane; it reminds me and informs me of things that I had forgotten and perhaps had never realized. I haven't read "Biswas" ["A House for Mr. Biswas"] since I passed the proofs eleven years ago; and your analysis gives me some idea of the strangeness of the book. It is a strange book, isn't it. The humility comes in when I think of your generosity and thoroughness; it also comes when I reflect on that past of work (gone, gone) and wonder about the future. Because I feel in myself such an emptiness and calm; and because, let me confess, I don't think I can cope with the fame that seems to be coming to me now. I really long to be alone, to think over that life, to extract the essence of it which I feel still remains to be extracted.

If I had to speak of omissions, insofar as a writer has any right to judge a critic in this way, I can find only one: in my last four books there always comes a point when it is necessary to write (and I became aware of it during "In a Free State"): There was *nowhere else to go to.* My own private predicament. I mention it only because I feel rather relieved that there was this one thing you didn't pick up. Everything else you got; and I think that in time you will see how tightly constructed "Free State" is, how every line of dialogue has a job of work to do ("Shall I put this in here, before my stop at the road-block, or leave it for later? How can I make a random beating-up convincing?" You can't make random violence believable on the printed page as you can in the cinema. Ah—you have to give someone the ghost of an excuse of a pretended insult—and then the violence is convincing: cause and effect satisfied.) A very curious work, full of internal consonances—I was aware of them only after the writing. Some of them I had to tone down—the repetitions and echoes—so that they wouldn't disturb. Bobby rubbing the bone behind Carolus's ear: the soldier rubbing his finger on Bobby's watch. The smashed watch that Linda notices on his wrist. All these things I became aware of, I say, after they had written themselves. I repeat all this to you as aspects of the mystery of this book, the mystery I suppose of all imaginative writing. They occurred: this is why at the end of something which I think is good I sometimes have the curious religious feeling of having only been a vessel. . . .

My handwriting deteriorates month by month. Not because I use a typewriter, but because I write by hand. I hope you have been able to read this letter without too much difficulty. I do hope that your book will show you some reward for your great sensitivity, labour, and love.

VIDIA

In September, 1972, Theroux came to the United States as writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia.

October 22, 1972

MY DEAR PAUL:

I am delighted by all the good news about your new novel ["Saint Jack"]. Let's hope something comes of the film option this time. It would be nice if a little of that kind of luck could brush me as well some time. Alas, for myself, I doubt it.

Here is something I would like you to do for me, assuming that it is in your power to do so. I need a *lot* of money very badly (or at least it seems to me that I need a lot of money). The only assets I have are my manuscripts (drafts etc.) & my other papers (correspondence etc.). A pretty complete documentation of my writing life from 18 to 40. Too much now for me to keep. I have half-offered them to the British Museum. They have replied officially & are inviting me to a preliminary lunch in three days' time, to talk the matter over. . . . It may well happen that after all this assembling of my papers, the B.M. & I will not agree on a price. I would like you to pass the word around that I am thinking of disposing of *all* my papers; perhaps someone in the U.S. may be interested.

Something I discovered has made me anxious to have the papers put away safely. In Trinidad this time, in an old cardboard box, I found *all* the letters I had written home. The pencilled notes I made on the P.A.A. aeroplane as soon as I got off the ground in July, 1950; my letter from the S. S. America; my first letter from London. All these things which I thought had been lost—what a thrill to see them, to rediscover them. And then I was immediately anxious that they might be lost or destroyed (riots etc.: not unlikely in Trinidad). So many of the letters are about writing; I was very ambitious from the start. As you know, I have been looking at my past (forgetting old fears), with the idea in my head of doing a kind of autobiography. Even if I don't do the book now, I may do it in 10 years' time; and then it would be nice to know that my letters etc. were safe in one place.

I would be most grateful if you could help me with this. But perhaps you would say that I should hang on to them for the time being.

VIDIA

April 5, 1981

DEAR PAUL:

A brief, fatigued note in reply to your nice letter. That novel sounds terrific—just the kind of thing you would do very well. Another Theroux blockbuster! Your energy is amazing; you seem vitalized by all your many successes. I run across your name and your books everywhere and I always feel slightly proprietorial.

I am lying low. Every little moment of intellectual pressure literally causes my hair to fall off—I count them on the pillow the next morning. But at 50 (or nearly) one seems to be extraordinarily full of affairs.

VIDIA

July 14, 1985

DEAR PAUL:

Thank you for your tender and moving note. I have a souvenir of your visit here. Your Japanese maple is doing well. It was planted in a glade, and it has liked what it has found.

I would be delighted to get a copy of your book.

I am melancholy in a clinical, helpless kind of way. I get, or am attacked by, these bad dreams just before waking up. In fact they wake me up.

Age. Lack of zing and the wish to do. Sorrow at being here, in England.

How nice, in the middle of this, to get your hand of friendship.

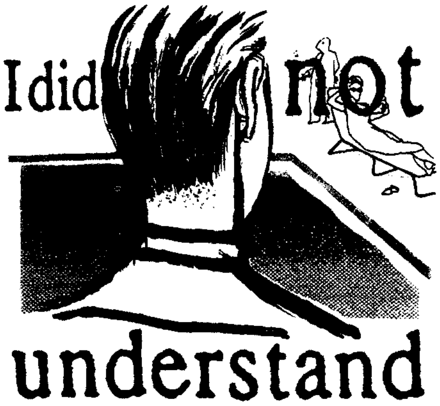
My own book, after eight months, is now fairly established. Another section to do; and the first draft will be completed.

VIDIA ♦

FICTION

POETRY LESSONS

BY PAUL THEROUX



I did not understand a thing I read, nor did I begin to write well, until I married and had children. It all happened quickly. I fell in love, in Africa, with Anne Castle, an Englishwoman, and within three years we were a family of four. That short time crammed with events changed my life, and all of it—love, marriage, children, debt—seemed inevitable. The ritual and romance of adulthood bred such intense emotions in me that one day I would see myself as a victim and another day as a hero. But I was simply being a husband and father.

In that same three-year period, we moved from Africa to Singapore. I was not ready to go home to the United States, and I wanted to see Southeast Asia, to be near Vietnam, perhaps go there while the war was hot. As someone who opposed the war, I felt obliged to be a witness. I also liked Singapore's image as a sleepy backwater, full of colonial relics, crumbling houses, and old habits. I signed a three-year contract to teach at the University of Singapore.

My small house was now noisy with my family and several inexpensive servants. I often complained about all my responsibilities. But deep down I was fulfilled. I knew how deep my pleasure was the day I agreed to return Ringrose's key to his house on the Jurong Road.

Ring Nose—that's what we called him behind his back at the Staff Club—had the office next to mine. The walls were thin, and I heard his telephone conversations, but everyone knew what I knew. He had just got divorced, and the old Singapore law was humiliating. The grounds were adultery, and his wife had had to name a corespondent; it was one of Ringrose's students. Ringrose countersued, named his wife's lover, Pratchett, from the Chemistry Department, with all the pens in his shirt pocket and the flip-flops on his feet—he had entered Ringrose's house wearing them, and the story went that he had left one behind, an incriminating rubber footprint. After this mess was settled, Ringrose's wife went back to England with their two children, and Ringrose was now living in an apartment in the noisiest part of Selangor Estates, pretending that he was not carrying on with the named student, a Chinese girl.

"I can't stand to look at that bloody house," Ringrose said. Having agreed to drop his key through the letter slot, I borrowed his car, and decided to turn the errand into a family outing. Where we lived, on Bukit Timah, the Chinese shops were full of ambiguous wonders, like snake wine and medicinal deer antlers and jars of crumbly pickled lizards. But there was nowhere for the children to play.

Jurong Road was the country: ragged, uncut jungle, defunct rubber estates, new red roads being made in the swampy ground. This was the old Asia of snakes and ferns and grottoes, and mossy shrines littered with blown-apart firecrackers.

Anne said, "I wish this were our house."

It was up an unpaved driveway, with verandas running around both the lower and upper stories, set among palms. It must once have belonged to a rubber planter—an estate manager, one of those adulterous drunks who were always turning up in the expatriate stories of Somerset Maugham.

We crunched down the gravel drive, scaring the wild birds, and we all piled out of the car. Anne had brought a ball for the children to play with, and some sandwiches and drinks. She joined me on the ground-floor veranda.

We looked through the windows and

FILIP PAGOWSKI

saw the Ringroses' chairs, their rugs, some carved Malacca chests, their ashtrays and pewter mugs; a playpen, a fruit bowl with no fruit in it, some scattered toys, and, in a room just off the hallway, a glimpse of a bedpost.

It was one of the saddest interiors I had ever seen. It was visibly haunted. The family had gone; their artifacts and their gloom remained. Each silent object had once radiated hope. You could imagine the family saying, "I love this," and, "Let's get two of those," and, "This is just right for the children."

Dead echoes in the furnished house.

It reminded me of one of those tombs—Egyptian, I suppose—where pots and pans and books, all the paraphernalia of a person's life, are buried with the corpse. No. 538 Jurong Road was the sarcophagus of a dead marriage, and we peered inside like the living looking into the window of a burial chamber.

"Let's get out of here," I said. I shoved the key through the letter slot.

Anne shivered and said, "I never want that to happen to us."

I had very little time for either reading or writing. We simply had no money. I earned six hundred Singapore dollars a month, which was two hundred American dollars. Fifty bucks a week.

We decided to be very frugal, but at the end of every month we were deeper in debt. Anne went to work, teaching at Nanyang, the Chinese university, and when this still did not pay our bills she taught at an English-language night school, too, in the basement room of a tenement. Being poor was like a dull ache. It forced habits upon us. All shopping took longer because we deliberated over prices; we seldom went out (even a movie was an unthinkable expense); and since we had no car and had to take buses, we were always waiting by the side of the road.

A year went by, then another. I was still on the lowest salary scale; still teaching the course called "Shakespeare's Contemporaries"; still working on my third novel. Africa had cured me of poetry, and fiction writing seemed to offer a hope of financial self-sufficiency. That was what I told myself, but I knew my soul was possessed; my head was full of plots and pronouncements, characters' names. I wrote each morning between seven and ten, lectured at eleven, had lunch, held tutorials in the afternoon, drank from five to seven, and then went home to my family. It was a strange and selfish existence, but it was what the other men did: the English, the Indians, the Chinese.

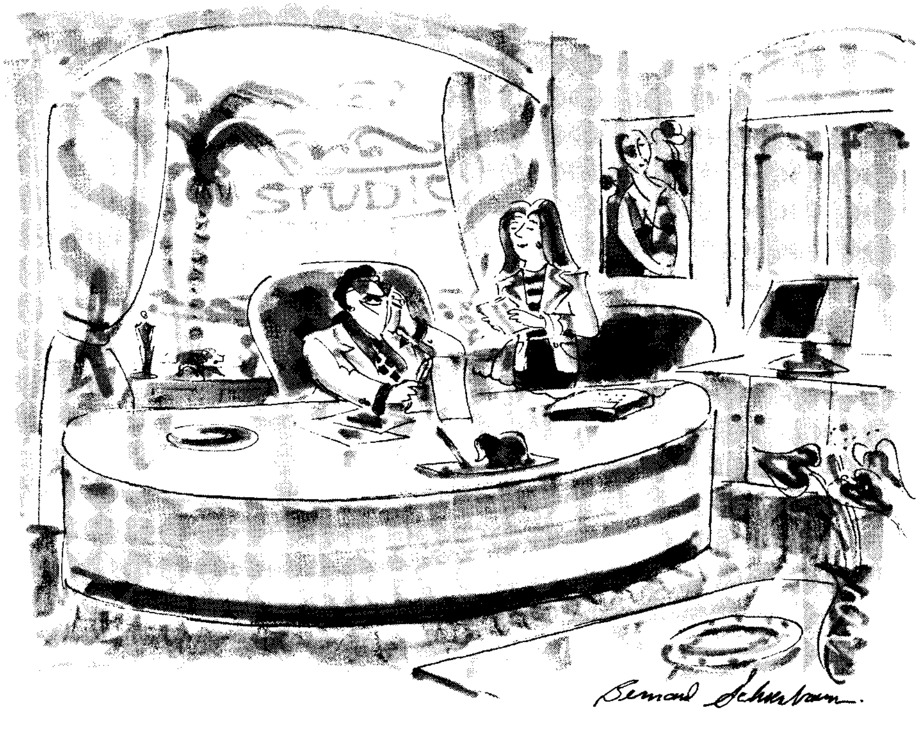
Just across Bukit Timah from our hot, semidetached house was Serene House, a private hotel that catered exclusively to soldiers on R. and R. from Vietnam—enlisted men. (The officers stayed several blocks away, at the Shelford, which had a better class of prostitutes and a forbidding fence.) Serene House was a glorified brothel, open only to the military and to prostitutes. Even the police stayed away. It was run with the connivance of the United States and the Singapore governments. I knew the gatekeeper, a Tamil Indian named Sathyamurthy, so I often dropped in on my way home from lecturing at the university.

The soldiers came for a week and teamed up with their girls on the first day. I saw the buses arriving every Monday, Sathya opening the gates for them and shutting them after the buses pulled away. Soldiers and hookers drifted around the neighborhood and sat on benches near the canal, holding hands. They had their pictures taken at Luck Ong's camera shop in the Bukit Timah Arcade, and these pictures were hung in the window, on display long after the hooker had moved on to other soldiers and the pictured soldier was gone and perhaps dead. Some of the soldiers ignored the girls, and simply drank and fought and watched cowboy movies. At the end of the week, the buses came and took them all back to the war.

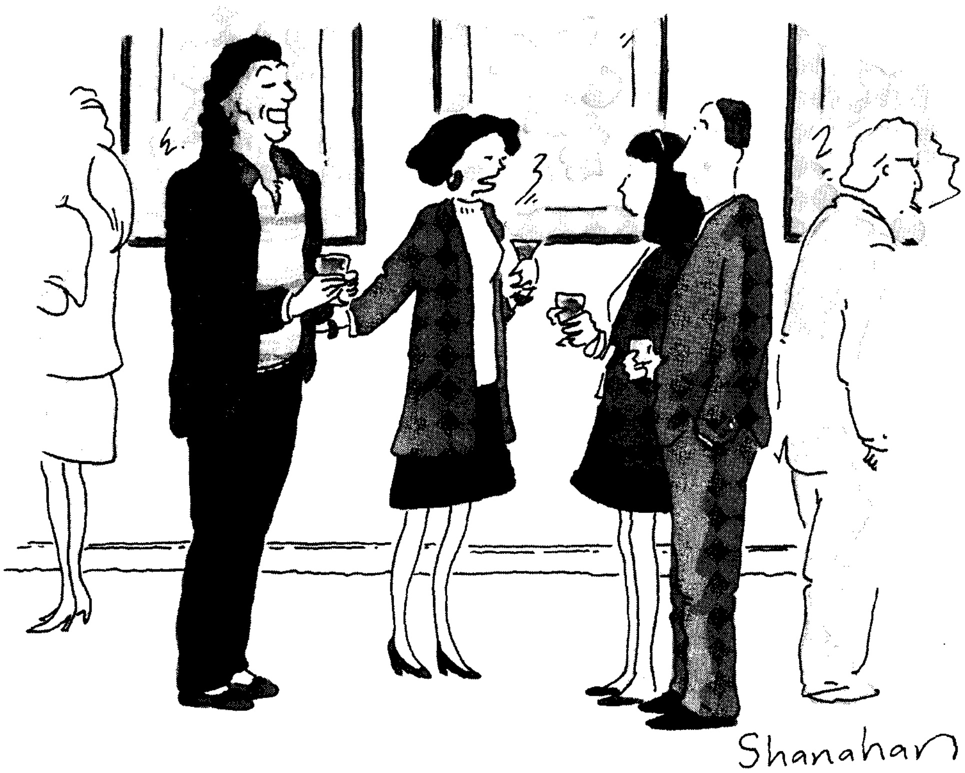
They could not draft me. I was married. I was one of those perspiring young men in shirtsleeves and sandals standing at the bus stop among the Malays and Chinese, or near Chop Keng Fatt Heng ("Provisioners") with a shopping bag of groceries in each hand. I felt old, fifty or more, which seemed elderly to me then. The cars driven by Malay chauffeurs went quickly past us, with their passengers dressed up for garden parties and drinks in the early evening. These expatriates were all strangers to me. They seemed not exotic but remote and foolish, inhabiting a world so different from mine that I had nothing to say to them. I hated them. I also thought, Please invite me.

We were sometimes asked to parties at the American Ambassador's residence. The Vietnam War caused such an invitation to be a moral dilemma, but not a serious one. We always accepted.

We were at an Embassy party tonight. When we expatriate teachers and journalists went to these parties, we drank too much, snatched



"You'll love it! It's a tale told by an idiot."



"Peter is completely fictitious, but he's extremely well written."

food from trays, insulted the diplomats and businessmen, and wandered outside into the Ambassador's garden and pissed on his orchids.

What we resented was the order, the peacefulness of this house: the United States of America. When we stepped outside afterward, we were back in Singapore. The Embassy resented us, too, but they had to invite us, because there were so few American civilians in Singapore. Perhaps they hoped that we would put them in touch with ordinary people. Perhaps we fantasized that they would give us privileged information. What it came down to was that they were there to serve free drinks and we were invited to drink them.

Tonight, something in the atmosphere of the Ambassador's residence made me feel especially unwanted and anti-social. I saw that Anne was talking with some other women, so I slipped into the library with the idea of stealing something—not a treasure, but an object that would be of greater use to me than to the Ambassador. I rationalized that a book might be just the thing.

I was looking at the spines of books on the shelves when a man came up behind me and said, "The books in a person's house reveal an enormous amount of what's going on in his head."

Another minute and this man might have seen me slipping a book into my pocket.

"What do these books reveal?" he said.

I saw history, politics, biography, diplomacy, statistics; there were no authors or titles I recognized.

"Not much, I guess." As soon as I spoke, I realized I was too drunk to hold a conversation.

"Nothing," the man said. "These books come in a job lot from the State Department. They go with the house. They're inventoried under the heading 'accessories.' "

I was nodding. I could not have put it better than that.

"There's no poetry," he said. "If there were, you'd know exactly who you were dealing with."

I liked him for saying that, but he seemed an unlikely sort to make that observation. It was the kind of thing one of my seedy university friends in the next room might have said, with his mouth full of quail eggs. (If you commented on his hogging food, he would spit egg flecks and say, "Fuck him! We're paying for it!") But this man was pink-faced and well-fed and wearing a dark suit and tie. You were only dressed like that in Singapore when your whole existence was air-conditioned. He wore a gold watch and chunky cufflinks and the sort of ostrich-skin shoes that were made to order in Hong Kong. And there was a certain expensive odor about him, a lingering leathery smell of money.

He said, "Been in Singapore long?"

"Almost two years. I teach at the university."

"Good for you. But you seem too young to be a professor."

"I'm not a professor. It's the British system. Only one prof—the head of the department. He has the chair of English. The rest of us are lecturers."

"You still seem young to have a Ph.D."

"I don't have one."

It was hard for me to hold a conversation in which I had to explain things. In my drunken condition I could listen or reply in monosyllables, but I garbled whole sentences.

"So what are your credentials?" he asked.

"I don't have any credentials," I said. "And neither does he." I had turned back to the bookshelves and seen the spine of a slim volume: "Life Studies," by Robert Lowell.

"You're sure of that?"

"I went fishing with Cal in the Lake District just before I came here."

The man seemed interested but somewhat disbelieving.

"Jonathan Raban introduced me to him. Raban's a friend of mine and of Cal's. You don't believe me."

The man stepped back a little and said, "It just seems so far away and incredulous."

That was the first hint I had that he was not at home with the English language.

"Cal," I said, "is short for Caligula."

I plucked off the shelf the book "In the Clearing," by Robert Frost. I opened it. There was a sticker on the inside cover, an American flag, and an inscription: "A Gift from the United States of America."

"Frost had no credentials. He never even graduated from college. But he taught his whole life."

"I suppose you knew him, too."

I nodded. "In Amherst. One day in 1962 I followed him into the Jones Library in the center of town. Up the stairs. Into the stacks. I had his new book in my hand. 'Mind signing it?' " I turned around to look into the man's big pink face. "Frost took one look at me and said, 'Do not pursue me!' Those very words."

"That's great," the man said, and now he did seem persuaded.

"But he signed the book. He said, 'I just signed a thousand of these in New York, and they're selling for fifteen dollars each.' "

"You can see his objection," the man said.

I smiled at him, but he was serious. He was beaming at me—his face was luminous with attention. His expression was deeper than simple curiosity. It was hunger, but more than that, it was the expression of someone used to getting what he wants.

I said, "And what's your line of work?"

"Electronics. Timing devices. Circuitry. Switches. Small motors." These words came out mechanically. He was merely reciting. But another wheel was turning in his head. "You're a writer."

"I've published two novels."

"That's marvellous," he said. "What about poetry?"

"I used to write it, but I haven't written much lately." I was too drunk to go into the reasons.

"Is writing a good living?"

I said, "No. It's a good life."

This impressed him, I could see.

"You must be very busy—teaching and writing."

"Yes," I said, but I did not feel busy at all. I was bored, I was neglected. There was so much more I could do if I were given the chance. I knew that my time would come, but for the moment I felt ignored. And as though this provoked a physical revulsion I suddenly felt nauseated and could taste vomit at the back of my throat.

"Are you ever free for lunch?"

"Sometimes," I said. The true answer was, Every day.

"I want you to meet my wife."

"Oh, yes," I said, and started away.

"Harry Lazard," he said, and seized my hand and shook it. "Hey, you look a little pale."

"I'm sick," I said. "Excuse me."

I hurried into the garden and puked behind the Ambassador's ferns. Behind me, seemingly oblivious of my retching, Mr. Lazard was saying, "You're the only person here that I envy."

HE called me the next day and invited me for lunch. He sent his car for me, a Daimler with a Malay driver named Ahmed who called me Tuan, Master. I sat in the back, enjoying the cool, silent trip down Orchard Road. Seen from inside an air-conditioned Daimler, Singapore seemed not just bearable but quaint and attractive. This was the city I had imagined before I came here.

Ahmed made a wide turn in to the Tanglin Club. After two years in Singapore, I was setting foot in the Tanglin Club for the first time; in less than a year, Harry Lazard had become a member. He had been waiting in the lobby and was telling me this as we made our way to the members' dining room.

He refused a menu and ordered the daily special: roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes, and brussels sprouts. Feeling overwhelmed, I ordered the same.

Lazard began belittling the food as soon as it was served.

"You must come over to my house sometime for a meal," he said. "It's a funny story. My wife and I had a great meal at Chez Michel. I asked to see the chef, and when he came to our table I asked him how much he was earning. He was Chinese. It wasn't much. I said I'd double his salary if he worked for me. He learned his cooking from a cordon-bleu cook in Saigon. He's mine now."

This impressed me.

"It was just a matter of money," Lazard said. "It usually is. Most people are underpaid in Singapore. That's the great thing about this place. They don't know how good they are. You can eat the best food in the world here."

His Singapore was air-conditioned and pleasant. Mine was hot and crowded. His was the Singapore of great cuisine; mine was the Singapore of fried noodles and the amah's soy sauce. I had no telephone, I swam in the Singapore River, I bought ganja from trishaw drivers. I knew that my Singapore was the past and that my days were numbered.

"Do you realize how clean it is here,

THE ERROR

When her grave opened its ugly mouth
Why didn't you just fly,
Wrap yourself in your hair and make yourself scarce,
Why did you kneel down at the grave's edge
To be identified
Accused and convicted
By all who held in their hands
Pieces of the gravestone gray granite
Proof of their innocence?

You must have misheard a sentence.
You were always mishearing
Into Hebrew or German
What was muttered in English.
Her grave mouthed its riddle right enough.
But maybe you heard in the air somewhere
An answer to one of your own
Unspoken enigmas. Misheard,
Mistook, and kneeled meekly.

Maybe they wouldn't stone you
If you became a nun
And selflessly incinerated yourself
In the shrine of her death.

Because that is what you did. From that moment
Shops, jobs, baby daughter, the German au pair
Had to become mere shapes
In the offered-up flames, a kind of writhing
That enfolded you and devoured
Your whole life.
I watched you feeding the flames.
Why didn't you wrap yourself in a carpet
Get to a hospital
Drop the whole mistake—simply call it
An error in translation?

Instead you fed those flames
Six full calendar years—
Every tarred and brimstone
Day torn carefully off,
One at a time, not one wasted, patient
As if you were feeding a child.
You were not feeding a child.
All you were doing was being strong,
Waiting for your ashes
To be complete and to cool.

Finally they made a small cairn.

—Ted Hughes

how orderly, and how rare a thing that is?"

I said, "They flog people for petty offenses. They have press censorship. They're very hard on my students. Recently the government took all their scholarships away, because studying English literature isn't part of 'nation-building.' That was the expression. The government wants economists and scientists. Poetry's an aberration."

"Why don't you quit your job?"

"I need the money," I said. "If something better came along, I'd jump."

"I'm very divided on Singapore," Lazard said. "I'm a chemical engineer by training. My firm makes and sells chemicals, as well as electronics."

"I'm surprised you're not foursquare for the Singapore government, then."

"I'm also on the side of the poets," he said. "They're burying the old Singapore. It will be gone soon. That's why I'm writing a novel about it. I want to write about the shop houses and the harbor and the hookers and Bugis Street, and the trishaws while you can still hear their jingling bells."

"What a wonderful idea," Lazard said. "A novel is, among other things, a social history."

"All writing is, I guess."

"Sure. Poems, too. If you read a poem about a train in England, it will be pulled by a steam locomotive. But there are no more engines like that left. Poetry hasn't caught up."

"A poetry reader," Lazard said, and unzipped his briefcase with an impatience that showed he had been planning to do this. He pulled out a thick, book-shaped magazine and showed it to me. *Metro Quarterly—A Journal of the Arts.* It opened almost by itself to the page he wanted, where a short poem was printed. I took the entire poem in at a glance: "Gorgeously, the fish fits its fins to the foam and controls the spin of its body over rock." It was signed Harold Lazard.

"Tell me frankly what you think of it. Be brutal."

"It's very good. I like its simplicity."

He smiled. He seemed not to believe me, but I insisted.

"And obviously the editor agrees with me."

He smiled again. He was a big man, with big, hairy fingers and heavy arms. It was hard to imagine these fingers holding a pen, writing a poem.

Perhaps my staring at his hands made him self-conscious. He said, "Yes, I'm a published poet."

Over coffee, he said, "How much do you earn?"

"Six hundred a month."

"That's pretty fair," he said.

"I don't have a car. My wife has to work to pay off our overdraft."

"But that's an American salary."

"No. Those are Singapore dollars."

Little spasms—of incredulity, almost of mockery—set his face in motion and rippled without settling. His eyes were frozen, a calculation going on behind them.

"Drink up," he said. "I want to show you something."

"THIS is where I live," he said as Ahmed turned in to a gateway in a high wall off Holland Road; but all I saw alongside the driveway were palms and a lawn and flower beds and marble statues. It was not until we had travelled for some distance that I saw the house, which was enormous, with a green tile roof and white stucco walls that were brilliant in the sunshine.

Near the pool, pale as marble, what I took to be another statue was a woman, whom Lazard roused with a shout.

"Fayette—over here!"

The woman frowned at him, and seemed to count to ten before she smiled and sat up.

"This is Paul Theroux," he said. "The fellow I was telling you about."

She did not move; she waited with a kind of queenly restraint while we circled the pool, making us do all the work. All the while she was dangling something from her finger, swinging it like a pendulum.

"You have a lovely place here," I said. "It must be an awful lot of work."

"It's no work at all." The pendulum was green, a carved piece of luminous jade on a gold chain.

"I meant all the landscaping."

"We have four gardeners." She smiled and swung the piece of jade.

She was a bony, attractive, sharp-featured woman, quite a bit younger than Harry, probably in her forties—a blonde, with a pinched, gristly nose that might have been the result of a botched nose job, freshly reddened lips, perfect teeth, and very pale skin that was slack at her arms. Here she was, outside by the pool, yet she obviously spent no time at all in the sunshine. And her pallor, which was almost that of ill health, set off her jewels—earrings, bracelets, necklace—and gave her a languorous sensuality.

She said, "Isn't Singapore marvellous?"

Again I thought that these people, just across the island from me and behind a wall, lived in a different Singapore. The flowers, the trees, the temperature—even the air was different here.

"Will you have something to drink?" Harry said.

"I don't want to impose," I said.

Fayette jammed the heel of her free hand against a push-button. In that same instant I heard a servant's squawk; then I saw him, a Chinese man in white jacket and pants, carrying a tray, emerging from the far end of the arbor.

"What do you have?"

"Anything you want," Fayette said.

"Orange juice will be fine," I said.

"It's real fresh. Mr. Loy squeezes it himself," Harry said. After the servant had gone for the drinks, Harry said, "There is something I'd like to ask you, Paul."

But before he could continue, Fayette let out a sharp cry of pain, and when I turned she was on her knees by the side of the pool.

"It jumped off my finger," she said, peering into the pool. "I can't even see it. Oh, God!"

Harry looked suddenly stricken and helpless, and he tottered as though his indecision made him physically unsteady.

"Harry can't swim," Fayette said with surprising satisfaction.

"I'll get it. I just need a bathing suit," I said.

"In the changing room."

Most of the spare bathing suits were large, making me think that everyone they knew was fat and prosperous. Even the smallest suit was large on me, but I cinched it and jumped into the pool, did a surface dive and saw the jade pendant glittering at the bottom. I missed it on my first try, but got it on my next dive. Now I saw how bright it was—emerald green, and intricately carved.

"My hero," Fayette said distractedly, and snatched at the jade piece without looking at me.

"That thing's worth a lot of money," Harry said.

"What is it?"

"It's a child's burial mask, and that's the rarest jade obtainable."

"Did you get it in Singapore?"

"Long story."

Fayette had turned her face on him, as though dreading the story and daring him to tell it.

Harry said, "Listen, I've got a job for you."

He had taken me aside and said, "You're going to think I'm nuts." I had to encourage him to continue, and he went on, "I want you to give me poetry lessons," and, "You already passed the hardest test—my wife likes you." I wanted to tell him that it was the craziest thing I had ever heard. But I made a serious face and assured him that it was a perfectly normal request.

I told Anne everything.

"The woman sounds awful," Anne said, "but the man seems fine—idealistic in a strange sort of way. Poetry lessons!"

"They're what I give my students," I said. "At least I'd be well paid."

"Americans are so funny. You're always trying to improve yourselves."

"Why shouldn't this guy learn to write poetry?"

"I didn't mean him. I meant you. That salary turned your head."

"You could give up teaching night school."

"That's fine with me," she said, and she laughed again, in puzzlement. "Here is this man with pots of money, and instead of sitting around and enjoying himself he wants someone to teach him how to write poems. Doesn't he know any better?"

"But you said he was idealistic."

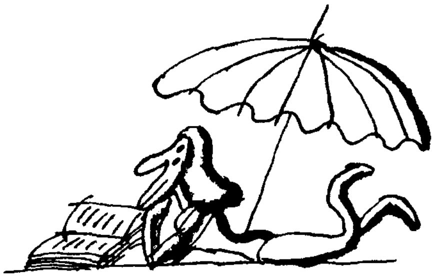
"I think I meant naïve. The idea that you can teach him that!"

"He seems to think I can—that's all that matters," I said. "It's very civilized of him."

We looked at each other and laughed at my pompousness.

"What are you going to tell the English Department?"

I kissed her and said, "To shove it."



"It's nice, burning bridges," Anne said. She wrinkled her nose, and I loved her for her bravery.

I saw Harry Lazard again; we drew up a satisfactory agreement. I would tutor him on weekdays in return for a rent-free house and a hundred U.S. dollars a week. It was for six months initially; but renewable. We already had our air tickets home. When I told the head of my department that I was resigning, he shrugged. He was half Chinese, half Indian, a former tax inspector named Ratnaswami, known behind his back as the Rat.

"We weren't planning to renew your contract, so it's just as well," he said. He grinned his stained-tooth grin. "We have someone else in the pipeline."

I hated him for that, but I hated myself, too: why had I stayed at this badly paying job for so long? The answer was that until now I could not afford to leave.

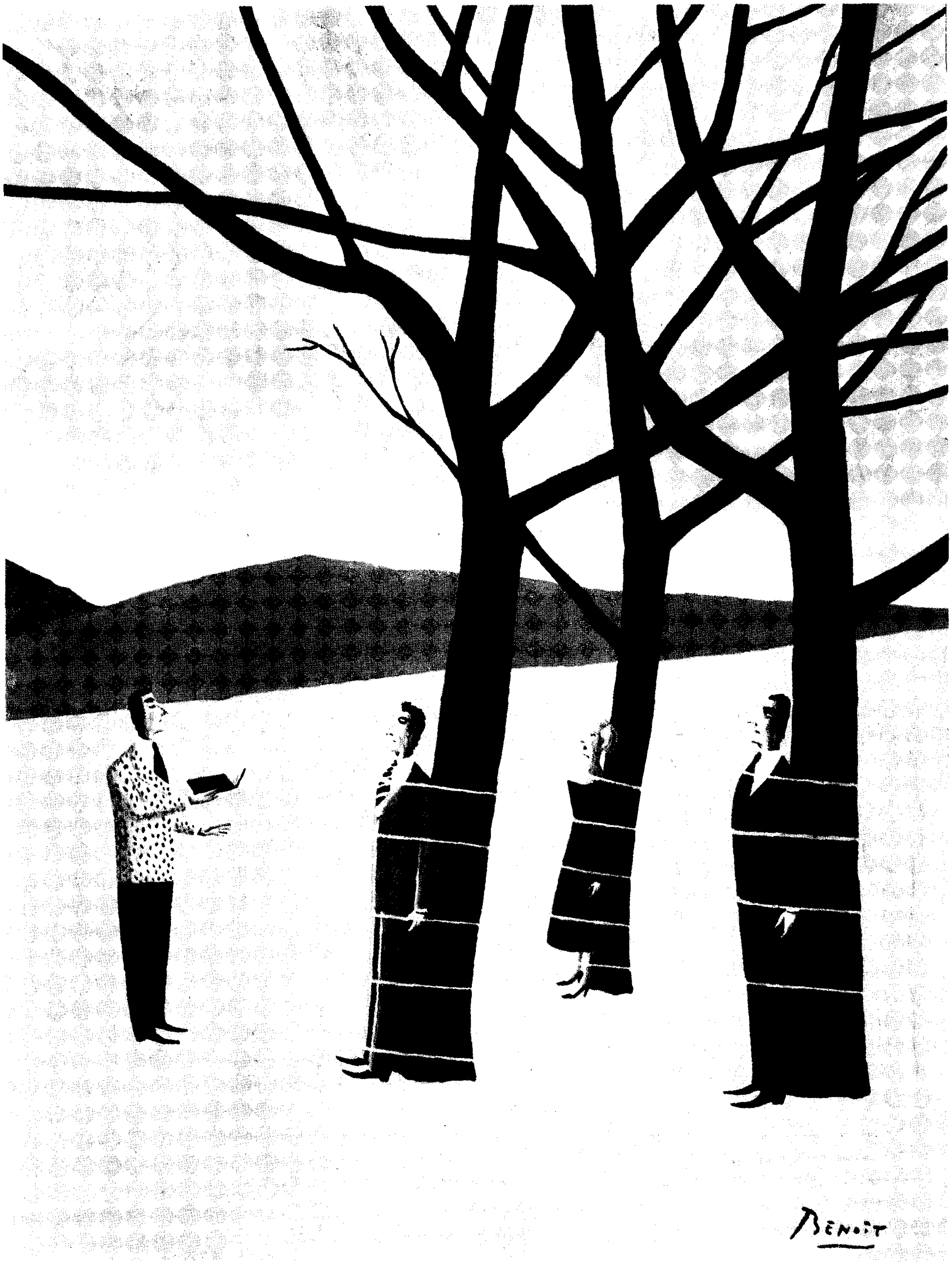
We pensioned off the two amahs, packed our belongings—everything we owned could go in one carload—and drove across the island to Holland Road, where we were met by Mr. Loy, the Chinese servant. The Lazards were away, he said. He showed us to the guesthouse, and before we had unpacked anything the children were out of the house, on the veranda, and across the lawn.

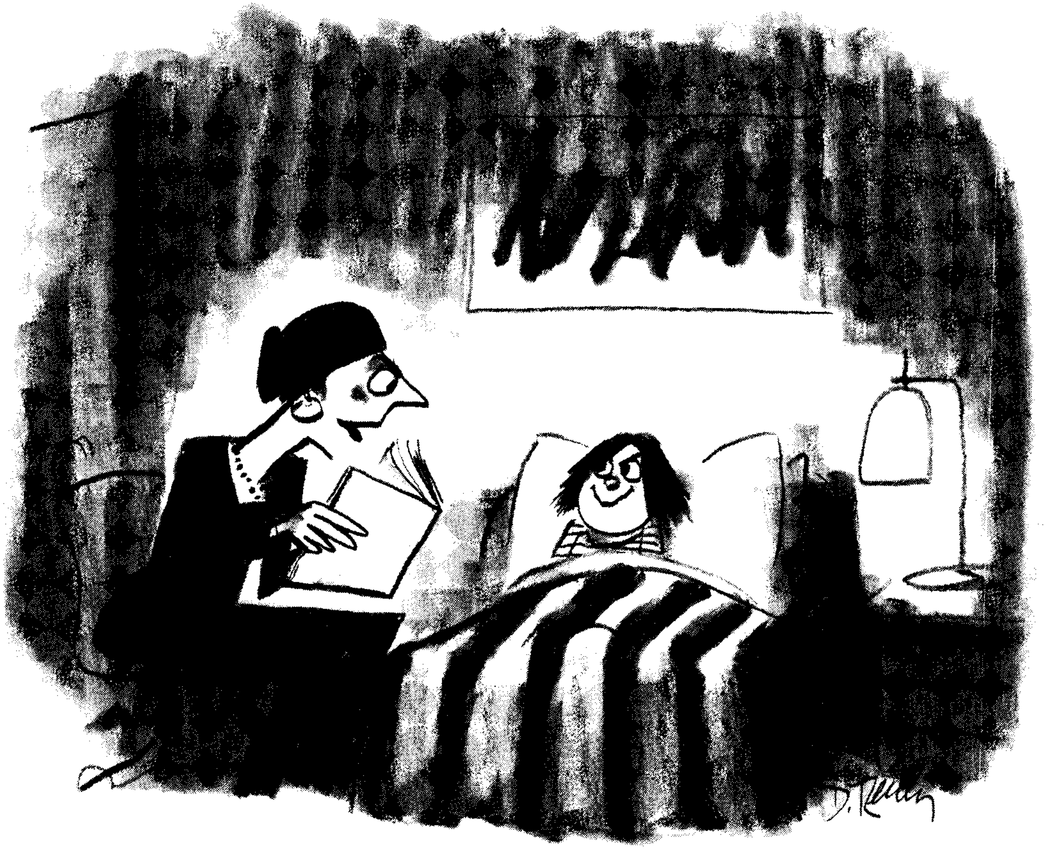
I watched them kicking their old blue ball, squealing with delight—safe in this lovely place. Anne's face was light with love as she watched them, and I knew that I had done the right thing. For the first four or five days before the Lazards came back, we lived the sort of life we had never known. We cooked our own meals and we ate together on our screened-in veranda. We had the swimming pool to ourselves. We played croquet. I did no writing, but I looked over what I had written of my novel so far, and I was confident that when I resumed, it would go well. These were glorious, peaceful days, and I felt an almost inexpressible gratitude toward this strange couple who had taken us in. I told Anne that this was how Third Worlders must feel when Americans entered their lives. It was as though we had been rescued.

But I also knew that I had been entrapped, even if it had been in the nicest

SKETCHBOOK · BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS

IRREPRESSIBLE INTEREST IN THE EUROPEAN NOVEL CONTINUES.





". . . and they lived intensely ever after."

way. If Harry Lazard had a gift, it was his ability to gauge what it was that a person needed. Everyone wanted something different. Money, a meal, space; when he found out what it was, he had you. This wasn't poetry, but perhaps, I told myself, Harry's was a poetic gift.

Then they returned—we knew it, even without an announcement. It happened in stages—first, something in the air, a tremulous attention, as subtle as a cloud shadow crossing a meadow. The servants stopped talking loudly to each other; they worked with greater care. The gardening was more meticulous, the nagging sound of the vacuum cleaner was almost constant, flowers appeared in vases, and most of all there was an air of watchfulness—not as though the Lazards might turn up at any moment but as though they were already there, hovering, about to explode into view.

One morning Fayette Lazard was in the chaise longue by the pool. The children hung back, feeling that their swimming pool had been invaded by a stranger, but I gathered them up along with Anne and introduced them to Fayette.

She hardly moved. She tilted her sunglasses and smiled.

"We were in Bangkok."

"Was it nice?" Anne asked.

"We're there all the time, because of Harry's business."

Anne persevered. "I've heard Bangkok's fabulous. I'd love to go there."

"They have TV," Fayette said, and frowned.

Anne took this to be a joke, and out of respect laughed very hard. But Fayette's expression was not deadpan, it was serious; then it was grim.

"Only two channels, though. We have nine in San Francisco."

We stared at her.

"I'll bet you love watching television," she said to Marcel. "What's your favorite program?"

"Television gives you square eyes," Marcel said in his quacking voice, with all the sententious certainty of a bright three-year-old.

Fayette turned to me, as though blaming, and laughed insincerely.

Anne said, "He's such a philistine. If Louis could talk he would assure you he quite likes the telly."

Was Fayette wincing behind her sunglasses? She said, "I hope you're comfortable."

"The guesthouse is lovely," I said.

"That's not the guesthouse, it's the old servants' quarters. The guesthouse is way over there." Her bright-red fingernail pointed the way.

We were so happy that not even this woman could spoil our fun. She spent an hour outside and then disappeared. She kept to the big house, occasionally shimmering onto the veranda. She never came to the guesthouse, as we went on calling it. It was only at the pool that we met, and the pool was big enough for everyone.

We had no need to leave the estate. A grocer came in his van every other day; we bought what we needed, and then he sought out Mr. Loy. We used the pool and the croquet lawn, and we walked on the gravel path through the three-acre woods. The arrangement worked because we did not fraternize with the Lazards. They gave a party, and we were not invited. It struck me as comic that we had met as equals at the American Ambassador's house, but here we were regarded as glorified servants—at least I was. I did not mind; my family was happy.

It was more than a week after he returned from Bangkok when I gave Harry Lazard his first poetry lesson. I realized that he was very shy—reluctant to expose his own talent, or lack of it. It was amazing to see this powerful millionaire made so timid by the prospect of showing me his poems.

I took the initiative. I saw him dropped off by Ahmed late one afternoon and I hurried across the lawn and up the hill to say hello. We chatted, Lazard offered me a drink; we began talking about things in general, and then about poetry.

He asked me, "Do you have any favorite poets?"

"So many," I said. "One is Wallace Stevens." And I remembered. "He was a businessman. Insurance. Went to his office every day. His secretary typed his stuff. Have you read him?"

"Wallace Stevenson—oh, yes, he's very powerful."

I was afraid to embarrass him by correcting him, and it hardly mattered, but it gave me an inkling that these poetry lessons might be harder than I had thought.

He said, "Do you still hear from Robert Lowell?"

"No," I said. "Harry, I only met Lowell that one time."

"It's not how often you meet someone, what matters is how deep an impression you make on them," Lazard said, and this was not the poet but the businessman speaking.

"He was impressed that I caught a fish."

"That's what I mean," Lazard said. "I should get him out here."

We looked across the lawn, past the trellises, the statues, the arbors. I tried to imagine Robert Lowell sitting by the pool, with his wild hair and crooked glasses and crazy gestures, getting drunk, teasing Fayette, insulting Lazard.

"Do him good," Lazard said.

We were seeing our own versions of the same thing.

The next day I ambushed Lazard again, and, taking a cue from him, I asked him who his favorite poets were.

"I'm very old-fashioned in my literary tastes. I like the old masters. Shakespeare. Keats. Lord Byron. 'Where have you been, Lord Randall my son?' That sort of thing."

"I gave tutorials on them. We had to teach all periods. What about the war poets?"

"Which war?" Lazard cried out, startling me.

"The First World War was the one that produced the most poets. I'm thinking of Edmund Blunden. Siegfried Sassoon. Wilfred Owen. Isaac Rosenberg. Have you read any of them?"

"Oh, years ago."

The expression "years ago" always seemed evasive and untruthful to me.

"Isaac Rosenberg sounds pretty interesting. What did he write?"

" 'Break of Day in the Trenches' and some others."

"Strange," Lazard said. "A British Jew."

"Disraeli was a Jew."

"Everyone says that," Lazard said.

"Mendelssohn was a Jew and Karl Marx and Mercadante and Spinoza. And the Savior was a Jew and his father was a Jew. . . . Your God was a Jew. Christ was a Jew like me."

Lazard gave me a puzzled, almost wounded look. "Are you O.K.?"

"I was quoting. That's in 'Ulysses.' Leopold Bloom says it to some Irishmen in a pub."

Then he was absolutely delighted, and he swished his gin-and-tonic and drank it and swallowed it with satisfaction and said, "I never thought I'd be sitting on this veranda talking about Joyce's 'Ulysses.' That's pretty unique!"

I just smiled. I found it impossible to reply with a straight face to something ungrammatical without sounding sarcastic.

We did not meet the following day, but a few days later, when he had a spare hour or two in the late afternoon, we sat together. He was still very reluctant to show me more of his poems, or even to write any, so I suggested that we read poems and simply talk about them.

"Good idea," he said.

I could see that he was grateful to me; glad that I did not expect too much of him. He liked having me there, on the estate, working on my book. He told me so. He was prompt in paying me my month's salary in advance.

But inevitably, with so little to do, I had a growing sense that I was superfluous. Whenever I saw the chef sitting behind the kitchen, reading *The Straits Times*, I remembered how Lazard had gone into the kitchen of Chez Michel on Robinson Road and offered to double the man's salary. With me it was peace of mind, literary pretension, luxury—a chance to live in old Singapore on the grounds of an imperial mansion, behind a high wall, with my family. It was a chance to work on my book, to be away from the bitter humor of the Staff Club. But I identified too strongly with the chef to feel at ease.

One night on our little porch, after the kids had gone to bed, I said all this to Anne.

She said, "This is the first time in ages that I've been happy. The kids love the pool. And I love not having to teach rotten old night school. What are you complaining about?"

"I'm not complaining. I'm just wondering."

"Please don't drag us away from here," she said. Settled here, protecting the children, playing with them, she had discovered that the sacrifices of motherhood gave her intense pleasure. And the boys had blossomed in her care.

Their happiness justified everything.

At the next lesson, Lazard said, "I'd like to share one of my poems with you."

He was apprehensive, snorting through his nose. He drew a stiff folder out of his briefcase and there, beautifully printed and mounted, was a twenty-line poem, about a traveller's inability to communicate with a non-English-speaking person. It was called "Say Something."

I read it, trying to think of a way of praising it.

"Be brutal," Lazard said.

"I like its bluntness," I said. "It's a sort of anti-poem. Almost boorish, the way the narrator is making demands on this local guy. Willfully inelegant. Very strong."

He was smiling admiringly at the poem.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "I think you're right." He showed me another poem in the same folder: "Market," by Harry Lazard.

It was a clumsy poem, in short lines listing the sights at a market that was obviously in Southeast Asia: the mangoes, rambutans, and durians; the stacked fish and swatches of herbs; the bags of rice. It was a list of items.

"It's good," I said.

"Go on, criticize it."

"I love the line 'Dead animals for sale.' "

It seemed to irritate him that I singled out this line for praise. At first he said nothing, and then, "It was an actual sign at one of the market stalls. I copied it down. That didn't take much work."

I said, "It's called 'found art.' It takes a poetic eye to recognize that a sign like that has poetic value."

"That's very true," he said. "What about its weaknesses? I'm sure it's got some. I just don't see what they are."

"I have a little problem with 'the dried red peppers strung like firecrackers waiting to go off.' "

Harry pressed his lips together.

"I worked hard on that particular line."

"The 'waiting' firecrackers is all I meant. Firecrackers don't wait. They don't do anything except explode."

"These ones looked like they were waiting," Lazard said. "Didn't you ever notice that some fireworks look like that? Like they're just waiting?"

He had begun to smile in encouragement at me, nodding in a twitchy way. He wanted me to say yes. I heard a child's distant shriek and then a splash, and Anne crying out, "Well done!"

"I guess so," I said.

"Sure. You get the idea."

IT was not all misery and submission for me, giving poetry lessons. Harry Lazard did not write many poems. What he seemed to like best was sitting and talking, telling me about his life, his struggles, his success. His father, an immigrant from Odessa, had been a concert violinist, and had never made a decent living. I asked Harry whether he himself played an instrument.

He said, "I hate music."

I had an urge to hit him for saying this, but I did not react.

He said, "Good for you. I told a man that once, and he burst into tears."

It would be very bad for me if I made my first million before the age of forty, he said. I told him I was not worried. On the subject of politics he often made statements that defied analysis. Of Lee Kwan Yew, the autocratic Prime Minister of Singapore, Lazard said, "His main strength is he's a dictator, and his main weakness is he's a dictator." This struck me as baffling—either very wise or very stupid.

One day, he called out from the veranda, "Paul, I've got someone here I want you to meet."

Seated on one of the wicker chairs was a pale, stoop-shouldered man in his sixties, very soft-spoken, in a rumpled shirt, obviously suffering in the heat.

"Nate, this is Paul. He's going to be a great writer someday," Harry said. "Nate's written some stuff, too."

"Would I have read it?" I asked.

Smiling sadly, he raised his limp fingers and waved the question away. "I'm here collecting material on leprosy," he said.

"There's none in Singapore."

"I'm on my way to Johore Bahru. There are some centers there."

"I worked in a leprosarium in Malawi about six years ago," I offered. I told him a little bit about the leper colony at Moyo. He became very attentive and patient, as though we had all the time in the world. It struck me that I had rarely met anyone so subdued and yet so compassionate. It was all in his posture and the way he moved; he took up so little space.

"Where are you from, Nate?"

He coughed and said, "Chicago, originally."

After Ahmed took him back to his hotel, Harry said, watching my expression with satisfaction, "That was Nathan Leopold, the child murderer. Remember Leopold and Loeb?" He was dying of cancer, Harry said, and so they had let him out to pursue his study of leprosy.

"A guy down at the Embassy put me on to him. You'll never forget this day, will you? You could write about it."

WE developed a rhythm that was simple and undemanding. Except for when he was away, we met two or three times a week, always in the late afternoon. We chatted, we drank tea, and after an hour Mr. Loy brought Harry a gin-and-tonic and me a pint of beer. Usually we discussed poetry, but I realized that Harry had read very little. He wanted to be my student and listen to me talk about poetry; he wanted me to listen to him discuss life, women, food, drink, the heat, power, and money. So we took turns being each other's student.

There was not much I could do about Lazard's poetry. His style, if such a word could apply to flat declarative statements, was artless, almost crude, and this gave his poems a simple power that I could praise without being a hypocrite, or at least that was what I told myself.

About a week after the Nathan Leopold visit, I heard Ahmed driving away, and, assuming that he had just dropped Harry off at the house, I crossed the lawn and went up to the veranda. Instead of calling out, I listened. The house was very still.

I stepped to the door. "Hello?"

I had no name for him. I was uncomfortable calling him by his first name, because the name Harry seemed so intimate; and calling him Mr. Lazard would have made me feel like one of his minions, like Mr. Loy or Ahmed or the Tonkinese chef, Victor.

"Paul?"

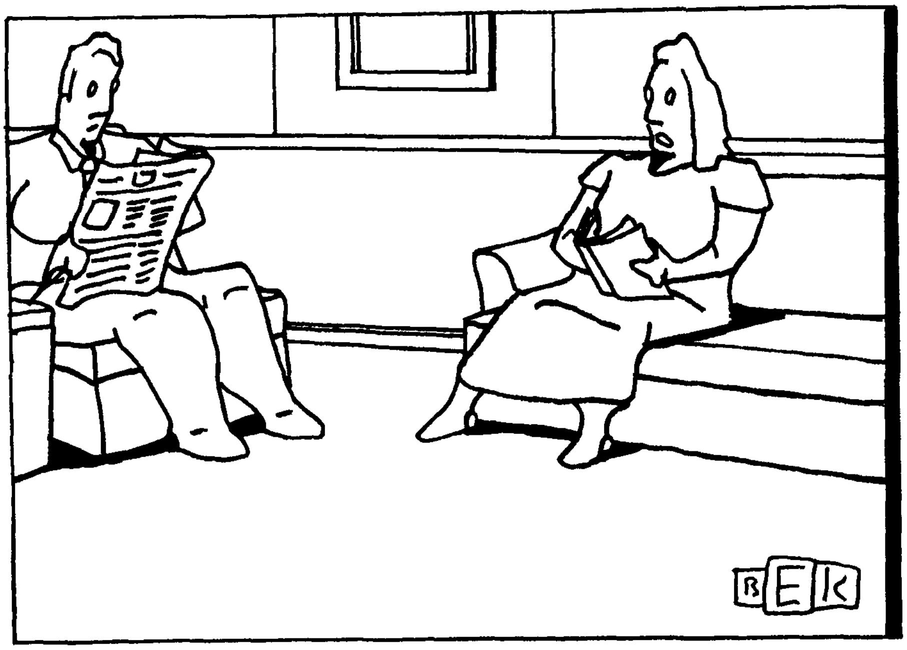
It was Fayette, but I had no name for her, either, so I called out, "It's me. For the poetry lesson."

"Come up."

But when I got to the top of the stairs I saw no one, only a long corridor of doors ajar.

"In here."

She was in the master bedroom, reclining by the window in her chaise



"Take away his brilliant prose, and he's just some depressed guy."

Victoria Roberts

"Stop paraphrasing and get on with your own life!"

• •

longue, a magazine open on her lap. Next to her was a lamp with a pink parasol shade, and behind her was a tall antique chest, from an herbalist, with a hundred drawers, each one identified with Chinese characters. She seemed so ignorant and obvious. It was all pretense—she was pretending to be reading, pretending to be resting, pretending my visit was accidental.

She said, "Sit down."

The imperious way she said it made me resist.

"I was just looking for your husband."

"Harry's on his way to the airport. He won't be back until Friday."

"That's all right."

"So it's just the two of us. What are you afraid of?"

"Who says I'm afraid?"

"Standing over there like I'm going to bite you."

I went nearer. She pushed some magazines off the seat of the chair next to her. She took my hand and held it, and I could feel her greed trembling in her bony fingers. I knew it was greed from her grip; it was hunger without appetite.

If Harry had walked in at that moment, he would have had reason to shoot me, but worse than this was the thought that not far away my wife and children were playing and perhaps one of the boys was saying, "Where's Dad?"

I primly tried to withdraw my hand. Fayette at first would not let go, and in the little struggle I lost my balance and had to steady myself on her thigh.

"What's this?"

She encircled her fingers and framed the little spot that I had touched.

I was so alarmed that I stood up and went to the window; I realized that I had visibly shuddered.

She said, "How can you write anything if you don't know anything?"

"I do my best."

"I'll bet you do."

Now she was moving one propped-up knee back and forth, her pretty sarong slipping down, no panties, and I could see the dark tarantula of her private parts.

"You pretend to be so innocent," she said.

In the gutter of the magazine was the carved jade burial mask that I had seen the day I first met her. She picked it up as though it were an hors d'oeuvre she was about to nibble.

"This piece is worth fifty thousand dollars, U.S."

"It's very nice."

She smiled at me, and it was obvious—in the cant of her unsteady head and in her eyes, not quite a matched pair—that she had been drinking.

"It's stolen," she said. "From a temple." She dangled it again. "They're all thieves."

Her tone was distinctly sour. I had the sense that in a matter of seconds her mood had changed and she was now very angry. She leaned over as though concealing herself to make a covert movement and snatched open one of the hundred drawers in the herbalist's chest, and—she was very drunk; I saw this plainly—slipped the jade mask inside and shut it.

"I have to go," I said.

"This is your poetry lesson," she said. "You don't have to go anywhere."

"You just said that Harry was away."

"But the lesson is all paid for," she said. "What do you think we pay you for?"

All I could think of was that in the two years I had worked at the University of Singapore, no one had spoken to me in this way.

"Are you trying to cheat us?"

I was so angry that I did not trust myself to reply; instead I glared at her and wondered how I could leave.

"Harry's problem is he's always trying to better himself to make up for his lack of education. I tell him, Why bother? This was a stupid idea, but he wouldn't listen. People like you are always taking advantage of him."

I denied it, but lamely, because it troubled me that what this drunken woman said was true.

"I'm giving him poetry lessons. He likes them. He's learning something."

"That's bullshit," she said. "He's a rotten poet and always will be."

"He publishes them in magazines."

"One magazine. He gave the editor a grant. If it weren't for Harry, they'd go broke."

"I think his poems are pretty good."

"How dare you patronize my husband."

"I'm not patronizing him—I'm patronizing you."

"You touched me. If Harry finds out, he'll castrate you."

I hated this woman, but what could I do? She was too drunk to listen to anything I said.

"Get out of here," she said. "What are you doing in here? This is my bedroom, sonny!"

"IS there anything wrong?" Anne said that night. The sun had set, but I had not turned on any lights, and I suppose I seemed thoughtful, if not anxious, standing silently in the darkness.

I said no, yet I knew as soon as I said it that it was a mistake not to open my heart and tell her everything that had happened between Fayette and me. This was the right moment. If I did not tell her now, I could never do it without seeming to be hiding something.

Anne looked so peaceful. Leaning over the tub, bathing Louis, protecting his eyes from the soap as she poured water over his hair. Marcel watched, another cherub, still pink from his bath, holding the blue Ladybird book of nursery rhymes which he wanted for a bedtime story.

"Dad, will you please read to me?" he asked.

I kissed them all, I read to Marcel, I said nothing more to Anne.

"You pretend to be so innocent," Fayette had said. But I was not pretending. I had come to Singapore for its name and its aura. I taught students because I thought they wanted to understand English literature. I moved here to Lazard's house because I thought he wanted poetry lessons, and a month ago, when he said, "You already passed the hardest test—my wife likes you," I took it as praise. I had believed him when he said the magazine had accepted his poems.

I was not innocent any longer.

Lazard returned on Friday, but I did not see him until Monday. I had used the time to work on my novel. He was in a good mood, and after we talked for a few minutes he said, "Have you been doing some writing?"

"Working on my novel."

"That's good."

"It's going well, thanks to—" I did not know how to finish the sentence: Thanks to your being away. Thanks to this luxurious estate. Thanks to your wife, who hardly speaks to us. Thanks to my nervous anxiety in wanting to finish the book and be solvent.

"Maybe you could put in a little note or something at the beginning—how we helped you out," Harry said.

There was not even the slightest undertone of irony in his voice, and his smug, beaky face had never looked more proprietorial. He was serious! And though I objected, and once again wanted to quit, I swallowed hard; I had a family to support. I was his prisoner. "Or maybe dedicate it to you," I said.

I knew he would not accuse me of mocking him. Someone incapable of expressing irony was equally incapable of hearing it.

"We wouldn't expect anything as elaborate as that." But he seemed to be savoring the idea. "It would be quite a tribute." I could see he was eager for it. He saw his name and Fayette's on the dedication page of my novel.

He said, "Fayette told me she had a little chat with you last week."

What did he know? What had she told him?

"Yes, I was looking for you. She said you'd already left for the airport."

He flipped open his wallet. He pinched out a snapshot of Fayette and passed it to me, and he sounded like a pimp when he said, "You see how lovely she is at forty-eight. Can you imagine what she looked like at twenty-three? She looks so sweet. People never believe me when I tell them that she wears the pants in the family."

"It's true, she looks absolutely angelic."

"She's been pretty low these past few days. Remember that carved piece she had, that you rescued from the bottom of the pool?"

"The jade mask?" I remembered her drunkenly stuffing it into one of the hundred drawers in the herbalist's chest.

"That's right. Seems she lost it somewhere."

"That's terrible. It must have been valuable."

He was not troubled. He said, "There's more where that came from."

Of course, someone would steal another one, and Harry would buy it.

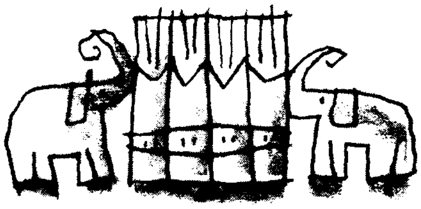
"At her last birthday I says, 'Hey, this will be a first. I never slept with a forty-eight-year-old woman before!' "

"Was she flattered?"

"She almost murdered me," Harry said. "She likes you, Paul." It was his pimp's voice—he was almost pleading. "You won't believe this, but she has barely a high-school education."

I said nothing. Some remarks were beyond the reach of irony.

"She's a little sensitive about that," Harry said. "I guess your wife went to college."



"Oxford," I said.

"Some of the smartest people on earth don't know the basics, I tell Fayette."

"My wife knows the basics."

"Fayette's in awe of you."

"There's nothing to be in awe of."

"Nathan Leopold said he'd heard of you."

"Prisoners read more than the average person."

"You're a published author," he said.

"So are you, Harry."

He did not smile. But he did not tell me the truth—that his grant to the magazine was his way of getting his poems published.

He was evasive, he was untruthful; yet still I respected him, because he wanted to know what poetry was all about and, though ill equipped for the task, was willing to face the difficulty. He seemed in that sense innocent, and even, as Anne had said all those weeks ago, idealistic.

We did nothing more in that lesson, but he made a point of saying that he wanted another lesson the next day. When I arrived, I was determined not to make chitchat or talk about Fayette.

I said, "Shall we look at Wilfred Owen?"

"I was reading it on my trip," he said.

I had typed out the poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth" so that we could discuss it.

"It seemed a little overdone," Lazard said.

I wanted to scream: He was in a muddy trench! He was gassed! Shells were exploding all around him! He saw men dying!

"The thing is," I said, as though to a child, "Owen actually saw these events at first hand. It was a nightmarish war. He died. So did Rosenberg and Rupert Brooke."

"What did Patton say? 'War is hell.' " Lazard sipped his drink and swallowed and smacked his lips in a knowing way.

"General Sherman said that."

"You sure?"

"It's in a poem by E. E. Cummings called 'Plato told him.' "

Lazard accepted this and then said, "Funny, isn't it? Poets writing about war."

"It happens all the time," I said. "That's the subject of the Aeneid. 'Of arms and the man I sing.' "

But Lazard had not heard me. "Oh,

sure, they're probably good poets. But you've got to wonder what kind of soldiers they were."

"Average soldiers, I guess."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means scared shitless."

"Been to Vietnam?"

I said no, and I was going to add that living across the road from Serene House I had met dozens of American soldiers; not one of them had spoken of the Vietnam War in any terms except horror and shame and waste.

That night I slept badly. I thrashed, and when I finally went to sleep I dreamed I was clinging to the side of a building, in a high wind. I woke. The wind was the overhead fan, but that was merely a detail in my dream of destitution. In the morning, I sorrowed inwardly, hearing my children laugh. But only I knew that this was all coming to an end.

At our lesson the next evening, I asked, "We were talking about Vietnam yesterday. Have you been there?"

"Many times. Most of my business is there."

"Innocent" was the acceptable word; the reality was that I was stupid. Electronics, he had told me.

"I wrote a poem on my last trip there."

Timing devices. Circuitry. Small motors. He had also mentioned chemicals. What did that mean—napalm?

"I think it still needs some work," he said.

He opened the stiff office folder and showed me the single sheet, clipped in. Its title was "Cap St. Jacques." He slapped his breast pocket. "Forgot my glasses—left them upstairs." He rose to go and then said, "Might as well come on up. We can talk there."

"I wouldn't want to disturb your wife."

"She's out—at a party."

In this seclusion and servitude on Lazard's estate, I had forgotten the Singapore parties. I followed Harry upstairs to the bedroom, and there, looking like the scene of a crime, was the chaise longue. Lazard had made me feel like a prisoner. I no longer felt that way, because I now knew that I had to leave. There would be less comfort for Anne and the boys, but they would understand.

"Go on, read it."

He passed me his poem. It was the sort of clumsy, matter-of-fact series of observations that he scribbled in the name of poetry. This one was about ten lines long, and it was dated. Its subject was the sky seen from the terrace of a fine hotel: clear air in the morning, helicopters and C-130s during the day, and, at night, galaxies of stars and fighter planes.

"It's a sky seen over the period of twenty-four hours," he said.

I said nothing.

"I'm a bad sleeper," he said.

I was holding the poem without wanting to read it again or even look at it. A hasty man would have crumpled it and thrown it in his face, but I was an enemy infiltrator in the disguise of a simple scholar.

"That's the old name, Cap St. Jacques," he explained. "That's where the French used to hobnob. Now we're hobnobbing, I guess you could say. They renamed it Vung Tau." He was still smiling at me. He began to look uncomfortable. "Will you excuse me? I think I picked up a tummy bug in Saigon. Ho Chi Minh's revenge."

He had not noticed that I had been silent the entire time. I watched him leave the room. And then I heard the bathroom door close and the click of the lock. That was comic: did he think I was going to intrude on him?

I went to the herbalist's chest, opened a drawer, and there was Fayette's jade carving. I quickly put it in my pocket and shut the drawer.

When Harry Lazard returned, I said, "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

He looked stricken. "You don't like my poem?"

We flew out of Singapore the next evening, stopping in Colombo, Karachi, Beirut, and Frankfurt before arriving, dazed and unsteady on our feet, in London. For a week, I had attacks of vertigo, an actual spiralling sense that I was dropping to the ground, and I had to look up at the sky to regain my balance.

The thirteen thousand pounds I realized on the jade carving (it was Chinese, Liao dynasty, probably tenth century) at the auction at Christie's, in South Kensington, was the purchase price of a Victorian house in Clapham. The spoils of war, I would have said, if anyone had asked. No one asked. ♦

"THEY BRING IN MARLOWE FOR THE POLISH, WE WALK—NON-NEGOTIABLE. THEY KNOW THIS. NOW, BILL. QUESTION. CAN YOU DO BATTLE SCENES?"
Shakespeare's Agent

FICTION

THE GREEN MAN

BY JEANETTE WINTERSON

To honor. To mock. To fear. To hate. To be fascinated. To laugh out loud.

The Gypsies come here every year, once a year. Come living. Come memory. Half dream. Half danger. Half man, half beast. Satyr them, satire us; safe, good, time-keeping, clean, for a day dragged in front of their silvered mirrors.

Get my fortune told. Buy a pony. Sharpen my knives to their murder edge. I wear my pants baggy but pass their glass and I look like a stag in rut. Down, sir! Oh, cool comfort on a sunny day that my embarrassment is mine alone. The river is wide where they camp either side, and I am clothed, but my reflection is naked.

They breed horses. That is, they breed themselves and sell off their children of the nether parts, piebald rascals all mane and tail, to set a swag at a girl. Well known it is that young girls love horses, loving the wild underside of themselves, loving the long neck and hot ears of animal seduction.

Buy the young lady a pony, and the trap is thrown in free. These round-bellied, glint-eyed hosses are Trojan horses. Truant, feckless, anarchic, unsaddled, and munching to bare earth the ordered weekends of Daddy's life: the lawn.

Didn't Daddy save up to move out of the city? Didn't he save for a painted house and a picket fence? Didn't he save for wife and daughter? And after one long, satisfactory shower of sperm hasn't his wife bottled him like a genie and taught him to spend his lust on the lawn?

Oh, the suburban weekend, oh!

On Friday, Daddy cuts the lawn. On Saturday, Daddy waters it. On Sunday, Daddy barbecues on the lawn. On Monday, Daddy leaves it and looks with half regret on his close-cropped green-eyed doll. His manhood is buried there and next weekend he'll spike it.

But the Gypsies are coming and his daughter is thirteen.

Talk of the town is that the fair should be banned. This time could be the last time if the mayor has his way. Time is gone when folks needed travelling play, when the bright band of Gypsy caravans looping down the hill made a gold ring of holiday fire. What the Gypsies sell you can buy anyplace and better. No one patches their pans with copper. This town is stainless steel.

Why am I frightened by the scissor man? Why does my heart curl? The noise of the blacksmith hurts my feet and the knife grinder whets my backbone. The redhead trull selling silk will deck me in a beaded scarf. She would make me her Corn King if she could and take what little I have left. The Green Man on the green lawn sprouting ears of wheat.

My daughter came back from school and said, "Daddy, in the olden days the Queen married the King and after a year she killed him!"

I said, "I know that, sweetheart."

She said, "It was to make the crops grow." And I went out and worked on the lawn.

The Gypsies are coming. Gutsy from the north. Open-faced from the west. Beguiling from the east. South and sexy. In less than a day's march, less than a night's scheming, by compass and constellation they will be here. Spread out the map and pinpoint me. I am voodooed head to foot.

My wife said, "What are those punctures in your chest?"

I said, "I fell on the spiker."

I have taken great pains to neaten the garden. It is a triumph of restraint. Although it is summer and clematis and rose would garland my head if I let them, I have clipped their easy virtue into something finer. They climb, they decorate, they do not spread. My wife admires this from her bedroom. Meanwhile, our inner and outer spheres have met at a point of mutuality. It is our daughter's birthday and the day of the fair.

When a horse pisses, it locks its front legs, raises its tail, and drops a shaft of vast dimensions that shoots a fireman's douse. This was the first thing we saw, the three of us, as we walked hand in hand in the field.

"Daddy, look," said my daughter and gripped my finger. The grass turned liquid. I thought, We shall have to swim for it. My wife's shoes were peep-toes.

A Hispanic came by selling ice creams.

"You want one?" he said, looking at the trunk of piss.

My wife paid, while my daughter and I stood helplessly together, and I thought, She wants to touch it. Oh, God.

She broke from my hand and went up and patted the horse, dry now, shrinking up into himself. The green pool winked at us.

We walked on, a normal three-way family, eating our ice creams. I tried to win at the shooting gallery, but they screw the guns. There was a woman behind me, the kind I don't like, big boots and jeans, and a slender body and a stare. She slung a gun and massacred the target. The stallkeeper laughed and said something to her in their own tongue. She chose her prize and strode away with it, another girl at her arm.

"*Ciao*, Reina," shouted the stallkeeper and I told my wife it was a put-up job to fake an even chance and pull a sucker after his luck.

He gestured to me. "Try again."

I said, "You screw the guns."

He shrugged and picked up a glass rolling pin. "Maybe your wife would like this?"

They were blowing glass at the next stall. There were men in leather aprons, their skin as thick and dark, playing on their soundless trumpets and forcing a ball of glass into the fire-shot air.

"See your future in it," said the hag who took the money. "Quick, now, as it comes."

I turned away. My wife wanted to buy a witch ball for her display cabinet. I said I thought it was a mistake. "It's just cheap stuff." But she liked the way the colors caught in the lacunae of the surface. Reluctantly I gave the hag the money.

She caught my hand as I did so. Instinctively, I closed it into a fist, but she twisted it like a doorknob, and my fingers fell open, palm up under her greasy stare. My one hand was much bigger than both of hers together. With her hooked nail she scored my heart line and laughed out loud.

"The heart stops," she said.

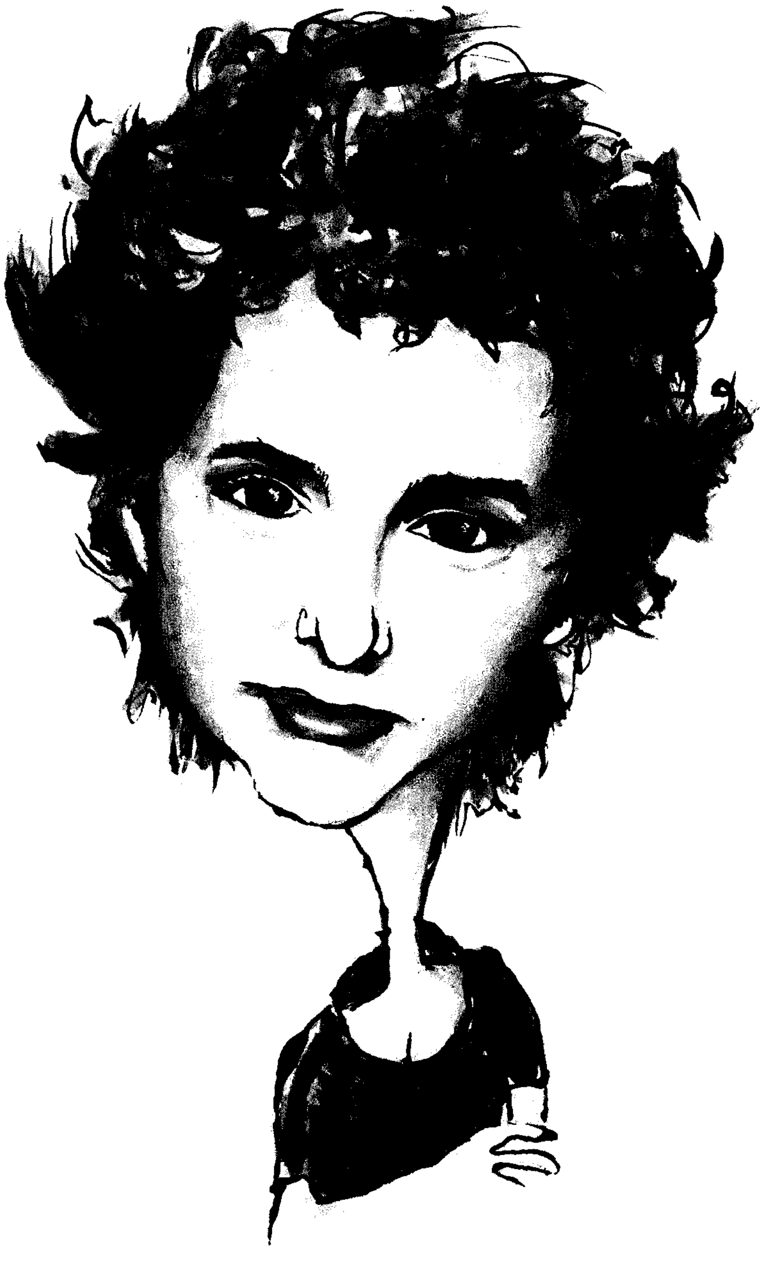
"You mean I'm going to die?"

"Only your heart."

I pulled away from her and put my hand up to my chest. My ironed-cotton chest. My heart was still beating time. The two glassblowers were looking at me with open contempt, as though I were the one filthy, scarred, vagrant. I stepped backward and collided with one of their women selling bracelets from a basket. My force spilled some of them, and I bent down with her to pick them up, saying "Sorry, sorry" all the while. I was conscious of the others watching me. Where was my wife?

I concentrated on scooping up the last of the fake, sliding gold and raised my head. Her breasts were by my mouth. Her breasts falling out of her man's loose shirt. Her breasts, tan, taut. Her breasts, unharnessed. She pulled my head forward, and even while I was pulling away I had her skin against my upper lip, and my cheeks were burning with shame, and I was worrying that I hadn't shaved enough and hating myself and hating this.

To honor. To mock. To fear. To hate. To laugh out loud. To be fascinated.



Normal male to Norman Mailer: Please tell me how.

ROBERT MELEE

WHERE was my wife? They were laughing at me, all of them, as I scrambled off the grass and blundered away. My wife and daughter were up ahead, moving at the same mesmerized pace as everyone else. I shoved through the tranced crowds and caught up with them both, their backs to me, hand in hand, my wife and daughter. I smoothed myself down and put my arms round their shoulders. My wife turned and smiled, and together we watched the jugglers, and my heart paced back to its normal metronome, and I breathed again, not too shallow, not too deep. I began to think about a beer.

"What happened to your trousers?"

My hand went straight to my crotch but my wife did not notice. She was glaring at my knees. I let my eyes travel downward, and there were two green splotches neatly capping my white ducks.

Yes, I know we have only just bought me these trousers. These trousers were expensive. These trousers are blatant in their whiteness. Sassy as a virgin courting a stain. These are bachelor trousers, not gelded chinos. These are touch trousers in fourteen-ounce linen, and we had a fight in the shop.

Now we shall have a fight in the field, and our raised voices have sawn out a circle in the crowds around us. Our daughter is embarrassed and walks away. My wife says, "Ruined." "Stupid." "Specialist cleaning." "Grass." "How could you." And gradually her words break up, out of their sentences, verbs and objects falling away, leaving the subject, me, me, failed again. Failure.

I could no longer hear her. Could see the words forming in glass bubbles out of the crazy trumpet of her mouth. My cartoon wife. Her cartoon husband. Waving their arms and blowing bubbles at the crowd.

TILL death us do part. Nothing in the marriage service about a pair of stained trousers. Let me pass. A man can still have a drink, can't he? I went into the beer tent, where there was a pianola and a long trestle table, a merciful place to hide my knees and prop my elbows. I don't go out to bars. I'm a family man. We like to eat together and share a bottle of wine. My wife buys it from the Family Wine Club. We usually get the Mystery Mix, and it's always the same.

Sometimes, when I leave for work early in the morning and my wife and daughter are still asleep, I truly believe that I will never come back. I love them both, sincerely I do, and I can't explain how you can love a thing and want to be parted from it forever. Sometimes I wish she would kill me, collect the insurance, go on with her life, and free me from the guilt of staying, the guilt of going.

A friend of mine did go, and now he lives in a rented place in the city, two rooms and no responsibilities, and he is about as miserable as before. Change your life, they tell me, in those popular New Age Bibles, and my wife and I both

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understand the importance of speaking the truth, and we have learned about quality time. Yet when I look at her and when she looks at me our eyes are pale.

What's in your eyes, darling? What do I see? The daily calculations of money and sex. How much of one, how little of the other, the seesaw of married life, keep the balance just. Keep the balance, just. I am a heterosexual male. My wife is a heterosexual female. Are we too normal to enjoy our bed?

Normal male to Norman Mailer: Please tell me how.

Have you ever had a boy? I'd like to, but I can't do it.

Listen to me. A man will try anything or thinks he will. I talk like a tomcat but I act like a worm. What happened to youth and glory? What happened to those bright days when the sun was still rising? Soon it will be midsummer and the light beginning to die back, imperceptibly at first, a few minutes a day, and then the gradual forcing back indoors earlier and earlier, helpless against the dark.

Midsummer used to be a fire festival. They light the bonfires on midsummer eve and burn them through June 24th, Midsummer Day. Maybe they thought they could prop up the sun in his luminary ride. Hold him in the heavens at his peak. It was a night of visions and strange dreams. A night of lawlessness, for the Corn King, the Green Man, could copulate with whomsoever he pleased. For a spell, time stopped. At the moment of decline, accelerate. Call it a wild perversity or a wild optimism, but they were right, our ancestors, to celebrate what they feared. What I fear I avoid. What I fear I pretend does not exist. What I fear is quietly killing me. Would that there were a festival for my fears, a ritual burning of what is coward in me, what is lost in me. Let the light in before it is too late.

The Gypsies have come down the hill, their eyes in burning hoops. Come ponytail, come pony. Come high water, come Hell. The river has risen with summer rain, rain in steam clouds above their fires. Fires infernal, fires illegal, bursts of water, bursts of flame.

The mayor says it will have to be stopped. This is a Conservation Area. No dumping. No overnight camping. No fishing. No fires. No hawking. No begging. No talking after lights out. No sickness without medical insurance. No travel without passports. No status without a bank account. No welfare without a job. No flirting. No slacking. No drugs. No queers (maybe rich ones). No foreigners (maybe rich ones or cheap ones). The Gypsies are here. Eyes the color of stars. Dressed in history. Dressed in rainbows. Some wear jerkins, some wear knee breeches, some wear swami robes, some wear cowhide coats. All wear gold and not the kind they sell. The men look like pirates. The women look like whores. Tall women, heads back, bold stare, easy hips. What right have they to walk as if they had never known pain? Do you watch the way people walk? I do. I look for the disappointments in their shoulders and the stress in their hips. Look for the slight limp that betrays their vulnerable side. The kind of man or woman they are is in their gait. I never give a man a job until I've seen the way he walks. I courted my wife because when she moved she seemed to take the earth with her.

What happened to us holding hands side by side? Somewhere in the fourteen years of our married life I seem to have had a sex change and converted to Islam. How else to explain the distance I lag behind? When I come home, still caught in the cobwebs of my day, my wife is planning our next holiday or working out the finance for a new car. I am still building the extension she designed two years ago. I have to fit it in with my job and the garden and time for my daughter, who loves me. My wife strides us on into prosperity and fulfillment, and I shuffle behind clutching the bills and a toolbox. She was right to make me drain the lawn. All our friends admire its rollered curves. I admire my wife. Admire our success. We were nothing, and she has coaxed out the grit in me and held me to my job. Why do I wish we were young again and she would hold me in her arms?

Listen to me. I sound like the fool I am. Fortunately, I am alone.

At that moment I looked up out of the comforting opacity of my beer and down the trestle table. Tightly packed, like rowers in a slave ship, were a couple of hundred men, heads on their fists, staring into their beer as if it were a crystal ball. And the table seemed to extend infinitely through the candy-striped canvas and out over the hills into the city and to be forever lined with men.

I got to my feet and left through an open flap at the back of the tent. I was away from the bustle of the fair and out by a few caravans, their fires pushing up smoke. Sitting beside one of the fires was the woman I had met already.

She said, "Take off your trousers."

"What?"

"I'll clean them for you."

She turned her back and went up the

wooden steps into a caravan. I was about twenty paces behind.

When I finally hesitated myself inside, she was pouring blue powder into a copper pot. The caravan was one of those old barrel types with a pair of long shafts for the horse to draw. Inside, it was panelled, carved, sprung, beautiful, clean. She had a feather eiderdown on the bed, and the bed was how a bed should be. Not too hygienic, not too hospital, not a showroom bed with matching sheets and pillowcases. She held out her hand for my trousers, and I wondered how her hair could seem so red that when she leaned over the copper there was no distinction between the soft metal and her soft hair.

She smiled and looked down at me. Not at my knees. I had my shirttails, but it was obvious how things stood. I suppose it was obvious how things were going to be, but when I bucked into her it was with the same surprise as all those years ago when Alison and I had walked in the woods and made love among the bluebells. I had the perfect freedom of loving her, and although we had never given up sex we had never found these woods again. I felt the trees closing over me and I slept.

It was dark when I woke up. I was alone in the bed. I sat up and grabbed the cover around me. Gradually, I could make out the shapes in the caravan, and I found an oil lamp with its wick just burning under its brass cover. I turned it up, and on the chair beside it were my trousers, neatly folded and dry.

I inspected the knees. The accusing stains had disappeared, but was it a trick of the light or were the trousers all over now hued invisible green? I dressed quickly and let myself out.

What time was it? I checked my wrist and found my watch had gone. Should I go back in? I couldn't. I wanted to be away, be home, not be noticed, not be caught. I still had my wallet.

As I set off through the fields, toward the empty stalls, I saw by the firelight a group of men leading a horse up and down. There was a girl on it, clinging to the mane, slithering a bit on the bare back. I changed direction to avoid them, but then I heard the girl shout, "Daddy! Daddy!" I started running toward her voice and, forgetting everything that had happened, I burst through the blanks of the men to the only thing that mattered and swept my daughter off the horse and into my arms. The men were laughing.

"What are you doing here?" I said. "Where's Mummy?"

"The young lady has bought a horse," said one of the men.

My daughter kissed me and said something about her birthday, and in my swimming head drowned in horse piss and laundry blue, another woman's body and my own tears, I thought, I have to get us out of here, I must get us home. I took her hand, and we walked slowly away, as cautious as a cat but unfollowed. One of the men shouted, "We will bring him tomorrow."

And I didn't care, because they didn't know me or where we lived. The fair would move on, and my daughter would forget, and I would forget.

My wife was watching late-night TV.

She said "Do you know what time it is?"

My daughter and I, hand in hand, looked at each other and each sheltered secrets the other half shared but could not betray.

The nights are short at this time of year; a reluctant darkness and a terrace of stars near enough to walk upon, as the gods used to do, before the light rinses the sky.

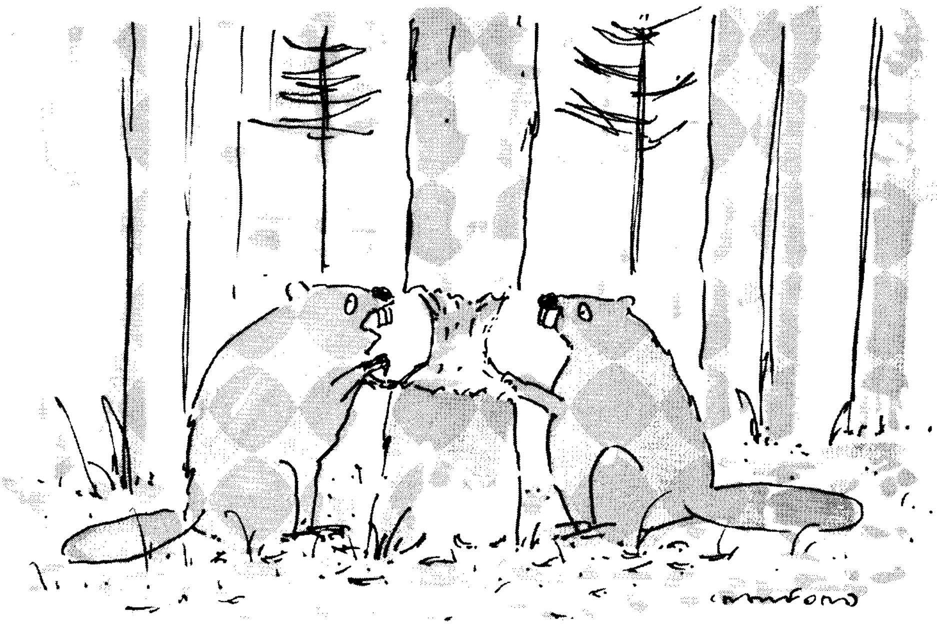
At dawn, around four o'clock, I was dozing, still dressed, on the green lawn, my wife and daughter sound asleep upstairs, when I heard a clip-clopping coming down the road in front of the house. Shiny noise of shod horse. I thought the hooves were going through my heart.

I jumped up and took a shortcut round to the front garden.

"Don't wake up, please, don't wake up," I prayed to the motionless windows.

The sky was turning laundry-blue and the copper sun through it. She was standing quite still, smiling at me, holding the horse by its halter. A bright bay the color of her. I thought, I could leave now and not come back. Grow a ponytail and wear a cowhide coat, and my mind bucked into hers with the force of the morning unworn by any but ourselves. There was a noise behind me, and my daughter came up beside me in her old dressing gown. She put her hand in mine just as the horse braced its forelegs and serenely shot its piss onto the clipped verge.

The Gypsy woman named her sum, an amount as extravagant as unaffordable, and I shooed my daughter back inside with me while I fetched the cash. I had drawn it out on Friday, as down payment on my wife's new car. The woman had tethered the horse to the fence post, and I on one side, she on the other, counted out the money. I noticed she was wearing my watch. As she took the last note and I withdrew my hand, she put it on her breast where her heart beat and kissed me. My heart stopped as she turned and walked away up the empty road. ♦



"This is a hell of a way to start a magazine."

FICTION

ACHATES McNEIL

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

MY father is a writer. A pretty well-known one, too. You'd recognize the name if I mentioned it, but I won't mention it, I'm tired of mentioning it—every time I mention it I feel as if I'm suffocating, as if I'm in a burrow deep in the ground and all these fine grains of dirt are raining down on me. We studied him in school, in the tenth grade, a story of his in one of those all-purpose anthologies that dislocate your wrists and throw out your back just to lift it from the table, and then again this year, my freshman year, in college. I had to take an American Lit class second semester, and they were doing two of his novels, along with a three-page list of novels and collections by his contemporaries, and I knew some of them, too—or at least I'd seen them at the house. I kept my mouth shut, though, especially after the professor, this blond poet in her thirties who once wrote a novel about a nymphomaniac pastry-maker, made a joke the first day when she came to my name in the register.

"Achates McNeil," she called out.

"Here," I said, feeling hot and cold all over, as if I'd gone from a sauna into a snowbank and back again. I knew what was coming; I'd been through it before.

She paused, looking up from her list to gaze out the window on the frozen wastes of the campus in the frozen skullcap of New York state, and then came back to me and held my eyes a minute. "You wouldn't happen by any chance to be a relation of anybody on our reading list, would you?"

I sat cramped in the hard wooden seat, thinking about the faceless legions who'd sat there before me, people who'd squirmed over exams and unfeeling professorial remarks and then gone on to become plastic surgeons, gas-station attendants, insurance salesmen, bums, and corpses. "No," I said. "I don't think so."

She gave me a mysterious little smile. "I was thinking of Theresa Golub or maybe Irving Thalamus?" It was a joke. One or two of the literary cretins in back gave it a nervous snort and chuckle and I began to wonder, not for the first time, if I was really cut out for academic life. This got me thinking about the various careers available to me as a college dropout—rock-and-roller, chairman of the board, center for the New York Knicks—and I missed the next couple of names, coming back to the world as the name "Victoria Roethke" descended on the room and hung in the air like the aftershock of a detonation in the upper atmosphere.

She was sitting two rows up from me, and all I could see was her hair, a Medusan snarl of wild demi-dreadlocks draped over everything within a three-foot radius. Her hair was red—red as in pink rather than carrottop—and it tended to be darker on the ends but ran to the color of the stuff they line Easter baskets with up close to her scalp. She didn't say "here" or "present" or "yes" or even nod her amazing head. She just cleared her throat and announced, "He was my grandfather."

I stopped her in the hallway after class and saw that she had all the usual equipment as well as a nose ring, and two eyes the color of the cardboard stiffeners you get as a consolation prize when you have to buy a new shirt. "Are you really—" I began, thinking we had a lot in common, thinking we could commiserate, drown our sorrows together, have sex, whatever, but before I could finish the question she said, "No, not really."

"You mean you—"

"That's right."

I gave her a look of naked admiration. And she was looking at me, sly and composed, looking right into my eyes. "But aren't you afraid you're going to be on Professor What's-Her-Face's shit list when she finds out?" I said finally.

Victoria was still looking right into me. She fiddled with her hair, touched her nose ring, and gave it a quick squeeze with a nervous flutter of her fingers. Her fingernails, I saw, were painted black. "Who's going to tell her?" she said.

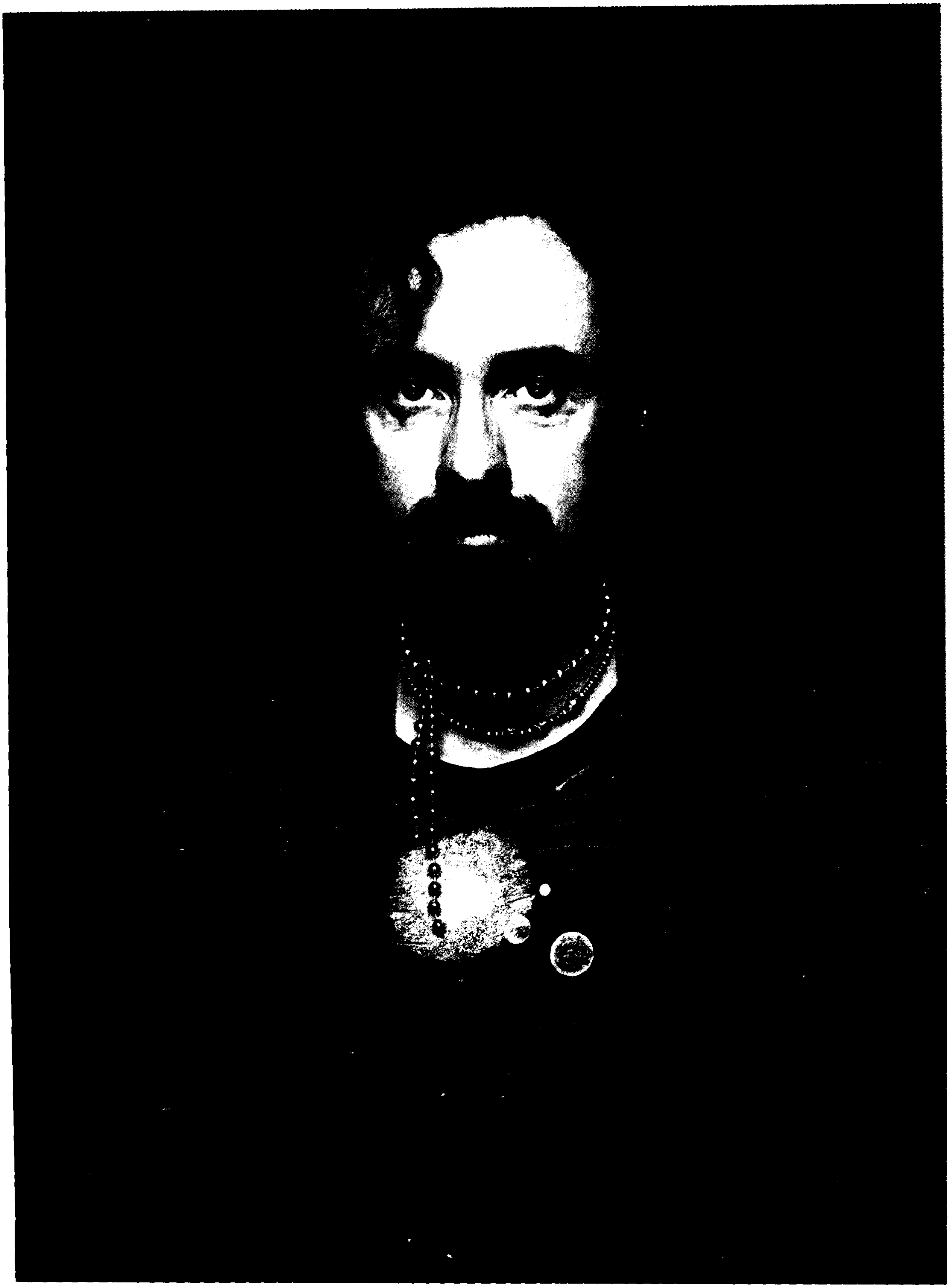
We were complicitous. Instantly. Half a beat later, she asked me if I wanted to buy her a cup of ramen noodles in the Student Union, and I said yeah, I did, as if it was something I had any choice about.

We ran through a crust of dead snow in a stiff wind and temperature that hadn't risen above minus ten in the past two weeks, and there were a lot of people running with us, a whole thundering herd—up here everybody ran everywhere; it was a question of survival.

In the Union she shook out her hair, and five minutes after we'd found a table in the corner and poured the hot water into the plastic-foam containers of dehydrated mystery food I could still smell the cold her hair had trapped. I also smelled the multilayered, festering odors of the place, generic to college cafeterias nationwide: coffee, twice-worn underwear, cream-of-tomato soup. If they enclosed the place in plastic and sealed it like a tomb it'd smell the same way two thousand years from now. I'd never been in the kitchen, but I remembered the kitchen from elementary school, with its big aluminum pots and microwave ovens and all the rest, and pictured the cafeteria ladies back there now, with their dyed hair and their miserable small-town loutish-husband lives, boiling up big cauldrons of cream-of-tomato soup. Victoria's nose was white from the cold, but right where the nose ring plunged in over the flange of her left nostril there was a spot of flesh as pink as the ends of her hair.

"What happens when you get a cold?" I said. "I mean I've always wondered."

She was blowing into her noodles and she looked up to shoot me a quick glance out of her cardboard eyes. Her mouth was small, her teeth the size of individual kernels of niblet corn. When she smiled, as she did now, she showed acres of gum. "It's a pain in the ass." Half



T. Coraghessan Boyle, photographed by Richard Avedon in New York City, June 5, 1995.

a beat: that was her method. "I suffer it all for beauty."

And, of course, this is where I got all gallant and silver-tongued and told her how striking it was, she was, her hair and her eyes and—but she cut me off. "You really are his son, aren't you?" she said.

There was a sudden eruption of jocklike noises from the far end of the room—some athletes with shaved heads making sure everybody knew they were there—and it gave me a minute to compose myself, aside from blowing into my noodles and adjusting my black watch cap with the Yankees logo for the fourteenth time, that is. I shrugged. Looked into her eyes and away again. "I really don't want to talk about it."

But she was on her feet suddenly and people were staring at her and there was a look on her face like she'd just won the lottery or the trip for two to the luxurious Spermata Inn on the beach at Waikiki. "I don't believe it," she said, and her voice was as deep as mine, strange really, but with a just detectable breathiness or hollowness to it that made it recognizably feminine.

I was holding onto my plastic-foam container of hot noodles as if somebody was trying to snatch it away from me. A quick glance from side to side reassured me that the people around us had lost interest, absorbed once again in their newspapers, cherry Cokes, and plates of reheated stir fry. I gave her a weak smile.

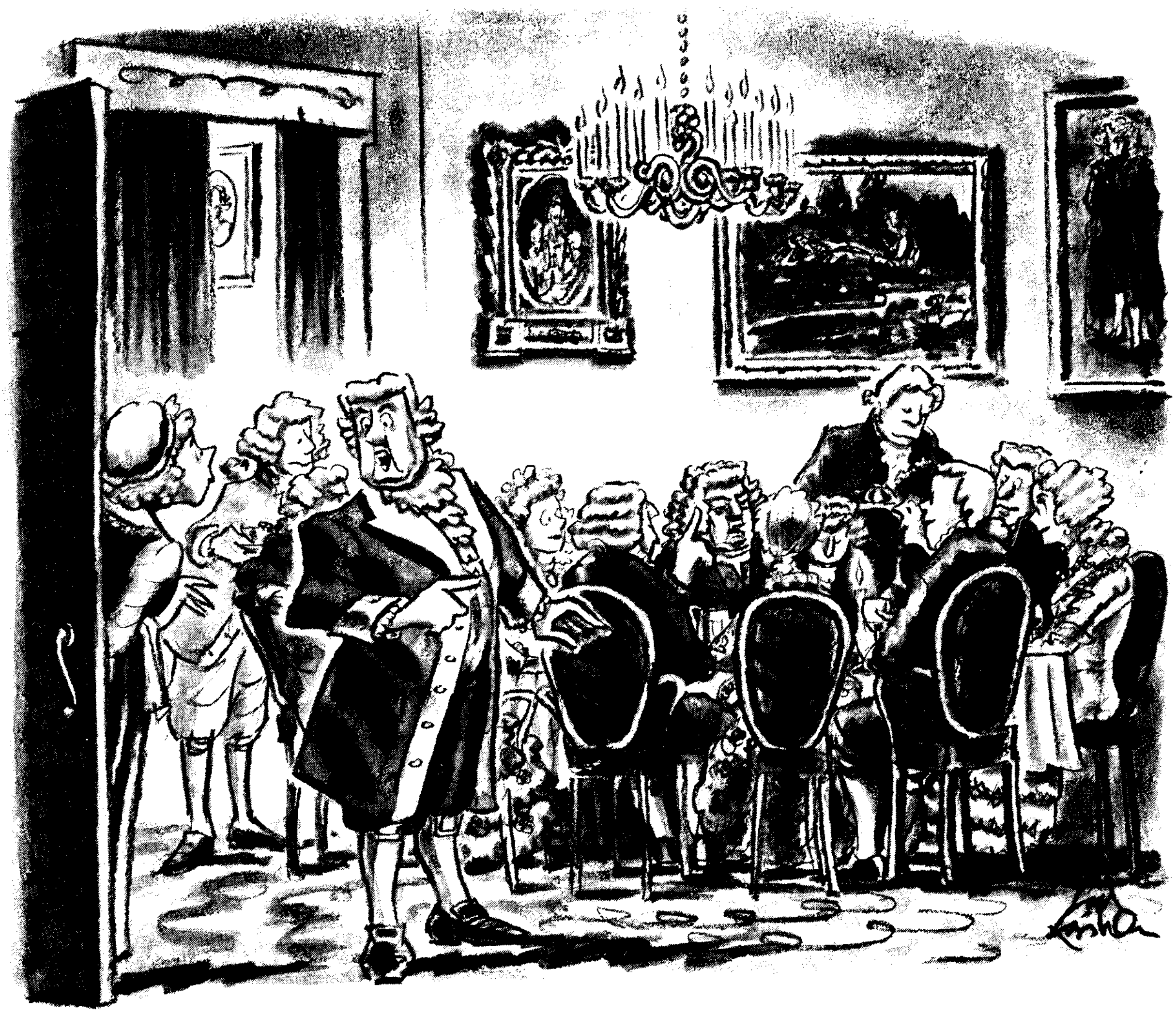
"You mean you're like really Tom McNeil's son, no bullshit?"

"Yes," I said, and though I liked the look of her, of her breasts clamped in the neat interwoven grid of a blue thermal undershirt and her little mouth and the menagerie of her hair, and I liked what she'd done in class, too, my voice was cold. "And I have a whole other life, too."

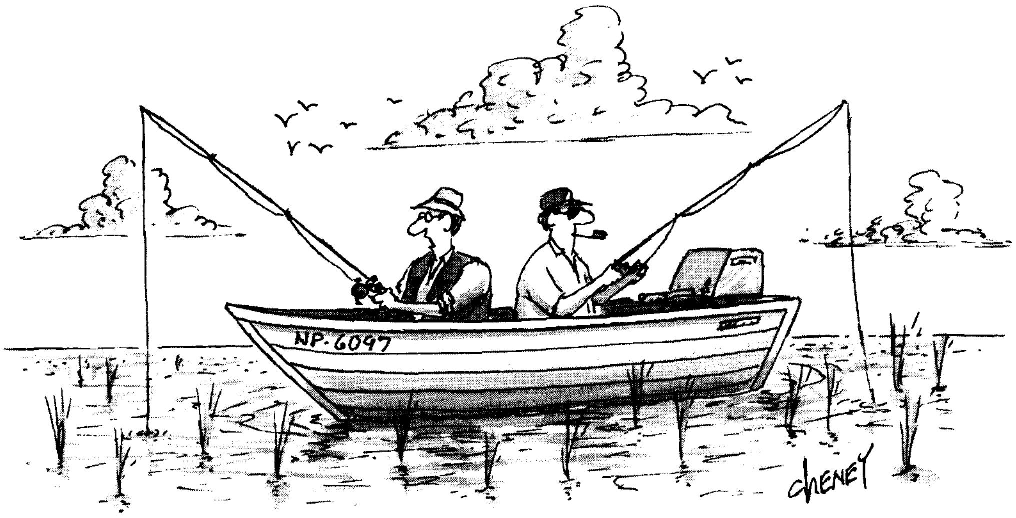
But she wasn't listening. "Oh, my God!" she squealed, ignoring the sarcasm and all it was meant to imply. She did something with her hands, her face; her hair helicoptered around her head. "I can't believe it. He's my hero, he's my god. I want to have his baby!"

The noodles congealed in my mouth like wet confetti. I didn't have the heart to point out that I *was* his baby, for better or worse.

It wasn't that I hated him, exactly—it was far more complicated than that, and I guess it got pretty Freudian, too, considering the way he treated my mother and the fact that I was thirteen and having problems of my own when he went out the door like a big cliché and my mother collapsed into herself as if her bones had suddenly melted. I'd seen him maybe three or four times since and always with some woman or other and a fistful of money and a face



"More port for Dr. Johnson. And more ink for Mr. Boswell."



"That one good novel I thought I had in me turned out to be a hormonal imbalance."

that looked like he'd just got done licking a pile of dogshit off the sidewalk. What did he want from me? What did he expect? At least he'd waited till my sister and brother were in college, at least they were out of the house when the cleaver fell, but what about me? I was the one who had to go into that classroom in the tenth grade and read that shitty story and have the teacher look at me like I had something to share, some intimate little anecdote I could relate about what it was like living with a genius—or having lived with a genius. And I was the one who had to see his face all over the newspapers and magazines when he published "Blood Ties," his postmodernist take on the breakdown of the family, a comedy no less, and then read in the interviews about how his wife and children had held him back and stifled him—as if we were his jailers or something. As if I'd ever bothered him or dared to approach the sanctum of his upstairs office when his genius was percolating, or asked him to go to a Little League game and sit on the stands and yabber along with the rest of the parents. Not me. No, I was the dutiful son of the big celebrity, and the funny thing was, I wouldn't have even known he was a celebrity if he hadn't packed up and left.

He was my father. A skinny man in his late forties with kinky hair and a goatee who dressed like he was twenty-five and had a dead-black morbid outlook on life and twisted everything into the kind of joke that made you squirm. I was proud of him. I loved him. But then I saw what a monster of ego he was, as if anybody could give two shits for literature anymore, as if he were the center of the universe while the real universe went on in the streets, on the Internet, on TV, and in the movie theatres. Who the hell was he to reject me?

So: Victoria Roethke.

I told her I'd never licked anybody's nose ring before, and she asked me if I wanted to go over to her apartment and listen to music and have sex, and though I felt like shit, like my father's son, like the negative image of something I didn't want to be, I went. Oh, yes: I went.

• •

VICTORIA lived in a cramped, drafty, ancient wreck of a nondescript house from the wood-burning era, about five blocks from campus. We ran all the way, of course—it was either that or freeze to the pavement—and the shared effort, the wheezing lungs and burning nostrils, got us over any initial awkwardness. We stood a minute in the superheated entryway that featured a row of tarnished brass coat hooks, a dim hallway lined with doors coated in drab, shiny paint, and a smell of cat litter and old clothes. I followed her hair up a narrow stairway and into a one-room apartment not much bigger than a prison cell. It was dominated by a queen-size mattress laid out on the floor and a pair of speakers big enough to double as end tables, which they did. Bricks and boards for the bookcases that lined the walls and pinched them in like one of those shrinking rooms in a sci-fi flick, posters to cover up the faded nineteenth-century wallpaper, a greenish-looking aquarium with one pale bloated fish suspended like a mobile in the middle of it. The solitary window looked out on everything that was dead in the world. Bathroom down the hall.

And what did her room smell like? Like an animal's den, like a burrow or a hive. And female. Intensely female. I glanced at the pile of brassieres, panties, body stockings, and sweat socks in the corner, and she lit a joss stick, pulled the curtains, and put on a CD by a band I don't want to name here, but which I like—there was no problem with her taste or anything like that. Or so I thought.

She straightened up from bending over the CD player and turned to me in the half-light of the curtained room and said, "You like this band?"

We were standing there like strangers amidst the intensely personal detritus of her room, awkward and insecure. I didn't know her. I'd never been here before. And I must have seemed like some weird growth sprung up on the unsuspecting flank of her personal space. "Yeah," I said, "they're hot," and I was going to expand on that with some technical praise, just to let her see how hip and knowing I was, when she threw out a sigh and let her arms fall to her sides. "I don't know," she said, "what I really like is soul and gospel—especially gospel. I put this on for you."

I felt deflated suddenly, unhip and uncool. There she was, joss stick sweetening the air, her hair a world of its own, my father's fan—my absent, famous, self-absorbed son of a bitch of a father actually pimping for me—and I didn't know what to say. After an awkward pause, the familiar band slamming down their chords and yowling out their shopworn angst, I said, "Let's hear some of your stuff, then."

She looked pleased, her too-small mouth pushed up into something resembling a smile, and then she stepped forward and enveloped me in her hair. We kissed. She kissed me, actually, and

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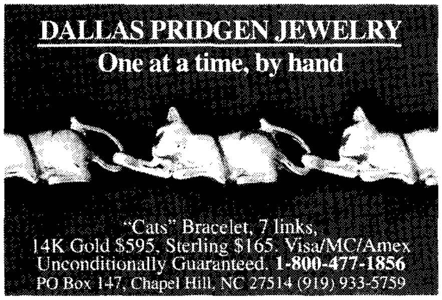

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I responded, and then she bounced the two steps to the CD player and put on Berna Berne and the Angeline Sisters, a slow thump of tinny drums and an organ that sounded like something fresh out of the muffler shop, followed by a high-pitched blur of semi-hysterical voices. "Like it?" she said.

What could I say? "It's different," I said.

She assured me it would grow on me, like anything else, if I gave it half a chance, ran down the other band for their pedestrian posturing, and invited me to get into her bed. "But don't take off your clothes," she said, "not yet."

I had a three-o'clock class in psychology, the first meeting of the semester, and I suspected I was going to miss it. I was right. Victoria made a real ritual of the whole thing, clothes coming off with the masturbatory dalliance of a strip show, the covers rolling back periodically to show this patch of flesh or that strategically revealed. I discovered her breasts one by one, admired the tattoo on her ankle (a backward "S" that signified, according to her, that she was a reincarnated Norse skald), and saw that she really was a redhead in the conventional sense. Her lips were dry, her tongue unstoppable, her hair a primal encounter. When we were done, she sat up, and I saw that her breasts pointed in two different directions, and that was human in a way I can't really express, a very personal thing, as if she was letting me in on a secret that was more intimate than the sex itself. I was touched. I admit it. I looked at those mismatched breasts, and they meant more to me than her lips and her eyes and the deep thrumming instrument of her voice, if you know what I mean.

"So," she said, sipping from a mug of water she produced from somewhere among the books and papers scattered beside the mattress, "what do I call you? I mean, Achates—right?—that's a real mouthful."

"That's my father," I said. "One of his bullshit affectations—how could the Great One have a kid called Joe or Evan or Jim-Bob or Dickie?" My head was on the pillow, my eyes on the ceiling. "You know what my name means? It means 'faithful companion.' Can you believe that?"

She was silent a moment, her gray eyes locked on me over the lip of the cup, her breasts dimpling with the cold. "Yeah," she said, "I can see what you mean," and she pulled the covers up to her throat. "But what do people call you?"

I stared bleakly across the room, fastening on nothing, and when I exhaled I could see my breath. Berna Berne and the Angeline Sisters were still at it, punishing the rhythm section and charging after the vocals till you'd think somebody had set their dresses on fire. "My father calls me Ake," I said finally, "or at least he used to when I used to know him. And in case you're wondering how you spell that, that's Ake with a 'k.' "

Victoria dropped out of the blond poet-novelist's lit class, but I knew where she lived, and you couldn't miss her hair jogging across the tundra. I saw her maybe two or three times a week, especially on weekends. When things began to get to me—life, exams, too many shooters of Jack or tequila, my mother's zombielike voice on the telephone—I would sink into the den of Victoria's room with its animal funk and shrinking walls as if I'd never climb back out, and it was nothing like the cold, dry burrow I thought of when I thought of my father. Just the opposite: Victoria's room, with Victoria in it, was positively tropical, whether you could see your breath or not. I even began to develop a tolerance for the Angeline Sisters.

I avoided class the day we dissected the McNeil canon, but I was there for Delmore Schwartz and his amazing recreation of a young man watching his parents' courtship unfolding on a movie screen in his head. "In dreams begin responsibilities"—yes, sure, but whose responsibility was I? And how long would I have to wait before we got to the sequel and *my* dreams? I'd looked through the photo albums, my mother an open-faced hippie in cutoffs and serape with her seamless blond hair and Slavic cheekbones and my father cocky and staring into the lens out of the shining halo of his hair, everything a performance, even a simple photograph, even then. The sperm and the egg, that was a biological concept, that was something I could envision up there on the big screen, the wriggling clot of life, the wet glowing ball of the egg; but picturing them coming together, with his coldness, his arrogance, his total absorption in himself—that was beyond me. Chalk it up to reticence. To DNA. To the grandiosity of the patriarchal cock. But then, he was me and I was him, and how else could you account for it?

It was Victoria who called my attention to the poster. The posters, that is—about six million of them, plastered all over every stationary object within a two-mile orbit of the campus as if he were a rock star or something, as if he really counted for anything, as if anybody could even read anymore, let alone give half a shit about a balding, leather-jacketed, ex-hippie wordmeister who worried about his image first, his groin second, and nothing else after that. How did I miss it? A nearsighted dwarf couldn't have missed it—in fact, all the nearsighted dwarves on campus had already seen it and were lining up with everybody even vaguely ambulatory for their $2.50 Student Activities Board-sponsored tickets:

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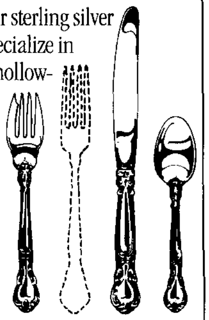
Victoria was right there with me, in front of the Student Union, the poster with his mug shot of a photo staring out at me from behind the double-insulated glass panel that reflected the whole dead arctic world and me in the middle of it, and we had to dance on our toes and do aerobics for a full two minutes there to stave off hypothermia while I let the full meaning of it sink in. My first response was outrage, and so was my second. I bundled Victoria through the door and out of the blast of the cold, intimately involved in the revolution of her hair, the smell of her gray, bristling, fake-fur coat that looked like half a dozen opossums dropped on her from on high, even the feel of her breasts beneath all that wintry armament, and I howled in protest.

"How in Christ's name could he do this to me?" I shouted across the echoing entranceway, pink-nosed idiots in their hooded parkas coming and going, giving me their eat-shit-and-die looks. I was furious, out of control. Victoria snatched at my arm to calm me, but I tore away from her.

"He planned this, you know. He had



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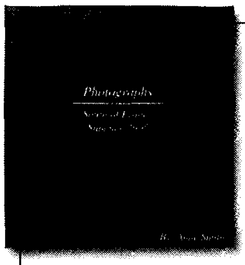

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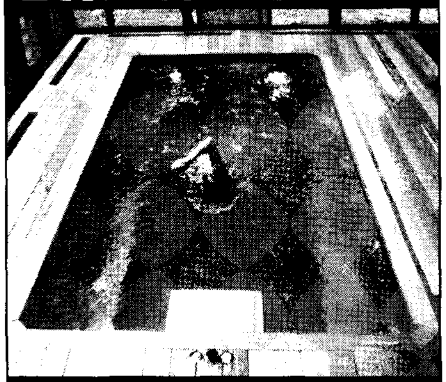

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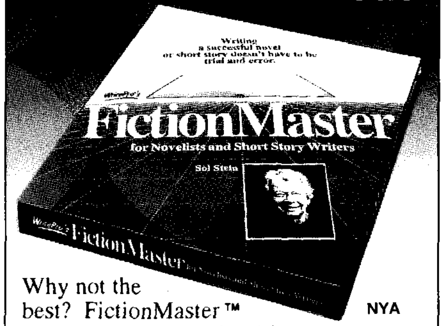
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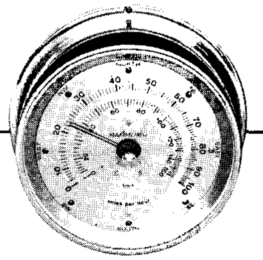

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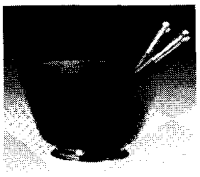

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to. He couldn't leave well enough alone, couldn't let me get away from him and be just plain nobody up here amongst the cow flops in this podunk excuse for a university—no, it's not Harvard, it's not Stanford, but at least I didn't take a nickel of his money for it. You think he'd ever even consider reading here otherwise, even if the Board of Regents got down and licked his armpits and bought him a new Porsche and promised him all the coeds in Burge to fuck one by one till they dropped dead from the sheer joy of it?"

Victoria just stood there looking at me out of her flat gray eyes, rocking back and forth on the heels of her red leather boots with the cowgirl filigree. We were blocking the doors, and people were tramping in and out, passing between us, a trail of yellow slush dribbling behind them in either direction. "I don't know," Victoria said over the heads of two Asian girls wrapped up like corpses, "I think it's kind of cool."

A day later, the letter came. Personalized stationery, California address. I tore it open in the hallway outside the door of my overheated, overlit, third-floor room in the sad-smelling old dorm:

> QUERIDO AKE:
> I know it's been a while but my crazy life just gets crazier what with the European tour for "Orphans" and Judy and Josh, but I want to make it up to you however I can. I asked Jules to get me the gig at Arcadia purposely to give me an excuse to see how you're getting along. Let's do dinner or something afterward—bring one of your girlfriends along. We'll do it up. We will.
>
> Mucho,
> DAD

This hit me like a body blow in the late rounds of a prizefight. I was already staggering, bloodied from a hundred hooks and jabs, ten to one against making it to the bell, and now this. Boom. I sat down on my institutional bed and read the thing over twice. Judy was his new wife, and Josh, six months old and still shitting in his pants, was my new brother. Half brother. DNA rules. Shit, it would have been funny if he were dead and I were dead and the whole world a burned-out cinder floating in the dead-black hole of the universe. But I wasn't dead, and didn't want to be, not yet, at least. The next best thing was being drunk, and that was easy to accomplish. Three Happy Hours and a good lip-splitting, sideburn-thumping altercation with some mountainous asshole in a pair of Revo shades later, and I was ready for him.

YOU probably expect me to report that my father, the genius, blew in to town and fucked my lit professor, Victoria, the cafeteria ladies, and two or three dogs he stumbled across on the way to the reading, but that's not the way it fell out. Not at all. In fact, he was kind of sorry and subdued and old-looking. Real old-looking, though by my count he must have been fifty-three or maybe fifty-four. It was as if his whole head had collapsed like a rotten jack-o'-lantern, his eyes sucking down these volcanoes of wrinkles, his hair standing straight up on his head like a used toilet brush. But I'm getting ahead of myself. According to my roommate, he'd called about a hundred times the day before and finally left a message saying he was coming in early and wanted to have lunch, too, if that was O.K. with me. It wasn't O.K. I stayed away from the telephone and I stayed away from my room. In fact, I didn't even go near the campus for fear of running into him as he long-legged his way across the quad, entourage in tow. I blew off my classes and sank into Victoria's nest as if it were an opium den, sleep and forgetfulness, Berna Berne and the Angeline Sisters keeping me company, along with a bottle of Don Q that Victoria's dad had brought back from Puerto Rico for her. What was my plan? To crash and burn. To get so fucked-up I'd be in a demi-coma till the lunch was eaten, the reading read, and dinner forgotten. I mean, fuck him. Really.

The fatal flaw in my plan was Victoria.

She didn't stay there to comfort me with her hair, her neat little zipper of a mouth, and her mismatched breasts. No, she went to class—very big day, exams and papers and quizzes. So she said. But do I have to tell you where she really was? Can't you picture it? Somebody who supposedly cared about me, and there she was, the fan, the diehard, camped outside his hotel in the arctic wind with the snot crusted around her nose ring. They wouldn't tell her what room he was in, and when she took exception to the attitude of the girl behind the desk they told her she'd have to wait outside—on the public sidewalk. While she was waiting and freezing and I was attempting to drink myself comatose, he was making phone calls. Another hundred to my room, and then to the registrar and the dean and anybody else who might have a glimmer of my whereabouts, and of course they all fell over dead and contacted my professors, the local police—Christ, probably even the F.B.I., the C.I.A., and T.R.W.

And then it was lunchtime, and all the honchos and cheeses from the English Department wanted to break bread with him, so out the door he went, not with Judy on his arm, or some more casual acquaintance who might have been last night's groin massager or the flight attendant who'd served him his breakfast, but his biographer. His biographer. Arm in arm with this bald guy half his height with a face depleted by a pair of glasses the size of the ones Elton John used to wear onstage, trailing dignitaries and toadies, and who does he run into?

Ten minutes later he's coming up the stairs at Victoria's place, and beneath the wailing of the Sisters and the thump of the organ I can hear his footsteps, his and nobody else's, and I know this: after all these years, my father has come for me.

LUNCH was at the Bistro, one of the few places in town that aspired to anything more than pizza, burgers, and burritos. My father sat at the head of the table, of course, and I, three-quarters drunk on white rum, sat at his right hand. Victoria was next to me, her expression rapt, her hair snaking out behind me in the direction of the great man like the tendrils of some unkillable plant, and the biographer, sunk behind his glasses, hunched beside her with a little black notepad. The rest of the table, from my father's other side down, was occupied by various members of the English Department whom I vaguely recognized and older lawyer types who must have been deans or whatever. There was a tense moment when Dr. Delson, my American Lit professor, came in, but her eyes, after registering initial surprise and recalculating our entire relationship from the first day's roll call on, showed nothing but a sort of fawning, shimmering awe. And how did I feel about that? Sick. Just plain sick.

I drank desperate cups of black coffee and tried to detoxify myself with something called coquilles St. Jacques, which amounted to an indefinable rubbery substance sealed in an impenetrable layer of baked cheese. My father held forth, witty, charming, as pleased with himself as anybody alive. He said things like "I'm glad you're asking me to speak on the only subject I'm an authority on—me," and with every other breath he dropped the names of the big impressive actors who'd starred in the big impressive movie version of his last book. "Well," he'd say, "as far as that goes, Meryl once told me . . ." or "When we were on location in Barbados, Brad and Geena and I used to go snorkeling practically every afternoon, and then it was conch ceviche and this rum drink they call Mata-Mata, after the turtle, and believe me, kill you it does."

Add to this the fact that he kept throwing his arm around the back of my chair (and so, my shoulders) as if I'd been there with him through every scintillating tête-à-tête and sexual and literary score, and you might begin to appreciate how I felt. But what could I do? He was playing a role that would have put to shame any of the big-gun actors he named, and I was playing my role, too, and though I was seething inside, though I felt betrayed by Victoria and him and all the stupid noshing doglike faces fawning round the table, I played the dutiful and proud son to Academy Award proportions. Or maybe I wasn't so great. At least I didn't jump up and flip the table over and call him a fraud, a cheat, and a philanderer who had no right to call anybody his son, let alone me. But oh, how those deans and professors sidled up to me afterward to thoroughly kiss my ass, while Dr. Delson glowed over our little secret and tried to shoulder Victoria out of the way. And Victoria. That was another thing. Victoria didn't seem to recall that I was still alive, so enthralled was she by the overblown spectacle of my father the genius.

He took me aside just before we stepped back out into the blast of the wind, confidential and fatherly, the others peeling back momentarily in deference to the ties of the blood, and asked me if I was all right. "Are you all right?" he said.

Everything was in a stir, crescendoing voices, the merry ritual of the zippers, the gloves, the scarves and parkas, a string quartet keening through the speakers in some weird key that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. "What do you mean?" I said.

I looked into his face then, and the

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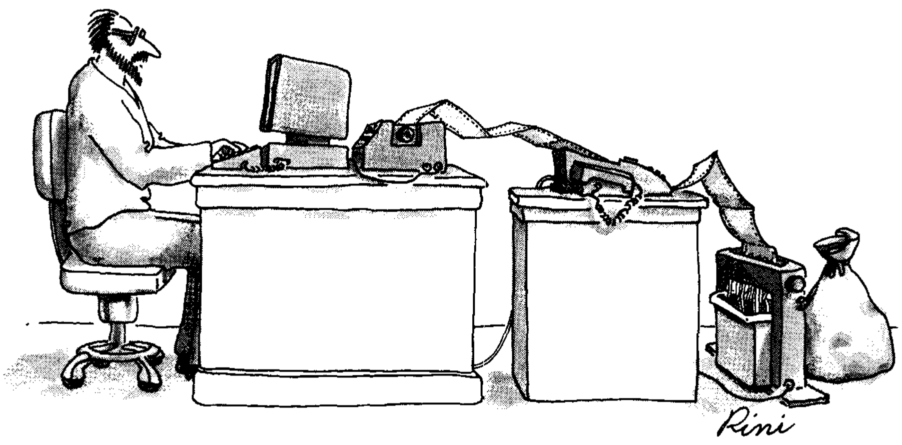

oldness dropped away from him: he was my pal, my dad, the quick-blooded figure I remembered from the kitchen, den, and bedroom of my childhood. "I don't know," he said, shrugging. "Victoria said—that's her name, right? Victoria?"

I nodded.

"She said you were feeling sick, the flu or something," and he let it trail off. Somebody shouted, "You should have seen it in December!" and the quartet choked off in an insectlike murmur of busy strings and nervous fingers. "Cute kid, Victoria," he said. "She's something." And then a stab at a joke: "Guess you inherited my taste, huh?"

But the dutiful son didn't smile, let alone laugh. He was feeling less like Achates than Oedipus.

"You need any money?" my father said, and he was reaching into the pocket of his jeans, an automatic gesture, when the rest of the group converged on us and the question fell dead. He threw an arm around me suddenly and managed to snag Victoria and the proud flag of her hair in the other. He gave a two-way squeeze with his skinny arms and said, "See you at the reading tonight, right?"

Everyone was watching, right on down to the busboys, not to mention the biographer, Dr. Delson, and all the by now stunned, awed, and grinning strangers squinting up from their coquilles and *fritures.* It was a real biographical moment. "Yeah," I said, and I thought for a minute they were going to break into applause. "Sure."

THE hall was packed, standing room only, hot and stifling with the crush of bodies and the coats and scarves and other paraphernalia that were like a second, shadowy crowd gathered at the edges of the living and breathing one—students, faculty, and townspeople wedged into every available space. Some of them had come from as far away as Vermont and Montreal, I heard, and when we came through the big main double doors, scalpers were selling the $2.50 Student Activities Board-sponsored tickets for three and four times that. I sat in the front row with my father's vacant seat between me and the biographer (whose name was Mal, as in Malcolm) while my father made the rounds, pumping hands and signing books, napkins, sheets of notebook paper, and whatever else the adoring crowd thrust at him. Victoria, the mass of her hair enlarged to even more stupendous proportions thanks to some mysterious chemical treatment she'd undergone in the bathroom down the hall from her room, sat sprouting beside me.

I was plunging in and out of the jungle of Victoria to make small talk, trying not to watch my father, unconcerned, unflappable, no problem at all, when Mal leaned across the vacant seat and poked my arm with the butt of his always handy Scripto pen. I turned to him, Victoria's hand clutched tightly in mine—she hadn't let go, not even to unwrap her scarf, since we'd climbed out of the car—and stared into the reflected blaze of his glasses. They were amazing, those glasses, like picture windows, like a scuba mask grafted to his hairless skull. "Nineteen eighty-nine," he said, "when he wrecked the car? The BMW, I mean?" I sat there frozen, waiting for the rest of it, the man's voice snaking into my consciousness till it felt like the voice of my innermost self. "Do you remember if he was still living at home

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then? Or was that after he . . . after he, uh, moved out?"

Moved out. Wrecked the car.

"Do you remember what he was like then? Were there any obvious changes? Did he seem depressed?"

He must have seen from my face how I felt about the situation because his glasses suddenly flashed light, he tugged twice at his lower lip, and murmured, "I know this isn't the time or place, I was just curious, that's all. But I wonder, would you mind—maybe we could set up a time to talk?"

What could I say? Victoria clutched my hand like a trophy hunter, my fellow-students rumbled and chattered and stretched in their bolted-down seats, and my father squatted here, sprang up there, lifted his eyebrows and laid down a layer of witty banter about half a mile thick. I shrugged. Looked away. "Sure," I said.

Then the lights dimmed once, twice, and went all the way down, and the chairman of the English Department took the podium while my father scuttled into the seat beside me and the audience hushed. I won't bother describing the chairman—he was generic, and he talked for a mercifully short five minutes or so about how my father needed no introduction et cetera, et cetera, before giving the podium over to Mal-as-in-Malcolm, the official hagiographer. Mal bounced up onto the stage like a trained seal, and if the chairman was selfless and brief, Mal was windy, verbose, a man who really craved an audience. He softened them up with half a dozen anecdotes about the great man's hyperinflated past, with carefully selected references to drug abuse, womanizing, unhinged driving, and of course movies and movie stars. By the time he was done, he'd made my father sound like a combination of James Dean, Tolstoy, and Enzo Ferrari. They were thrilled, every last man, woman, and drooling freshman. And me, the only one in the audience who really knew him? I wanted to puke, puke till the auditorium was filled with it. But I couldn't. I was trapped, just like in some nightmare. Right there in the middle of the front row.

When Mal finally ducked his denuded head and announced my father, the applause was seismic, as if the whole auditorium had been tipped on end, and

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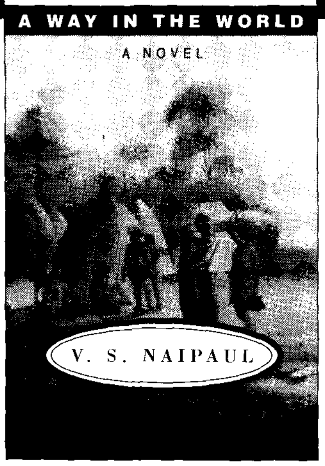

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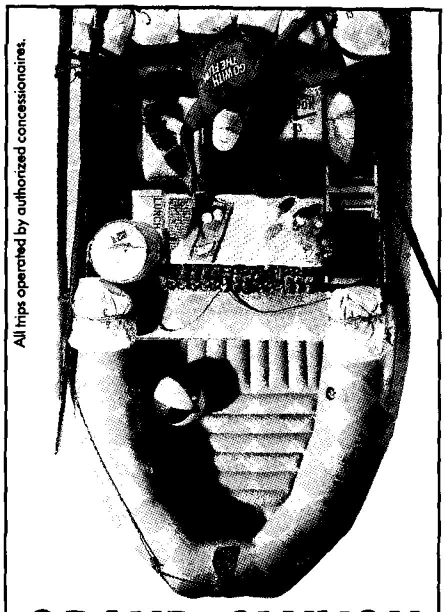

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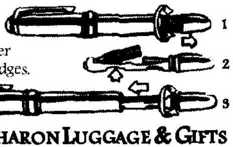

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the great man, in one of his own tour T-shirts and the omnipresent leather jacket, took the stage and engaged in a little high-fiving with the departing biographer while the thunder gradually subsided and the faces around me went slack with wonder. For the next fifteen minutes, he pranced and strutted across the stage, ignoring the podium and delivering a pre-programmed monologue that was the equal of anything you'd see on late-night TV. At least, all the morons around me thought so. He charmed them, out-hipped them, and they laughed, snorted, sniggered, and howled. Some of them, no doubt my fellow-freshmen, even stamped their feet in thunderous unison, as if they were at a pep rally or something. And the jokes—the sort of thing he'd come on with at lunch—were all so self-effacing, at least on the surface, but deep down each phrase and buttressed pause was calculated to remind us we were in the presence of one of the heroes of literature. There was the drinking-with-Bukowski story, which had been reproduced in every interview he'd done in the last twenty years, the travelling-through-Russia-with-nothing-but-a-pair-of-jeans-two-socks-and-a-leather-jacket-after-his-luggage-was-stolen story, the obligatory movie-star story and three or four don't-ask-me-now references to his wild past. I sat there like a condemned man awaiting the lethal injection, a rigid smile frozen to my face. My scalp itched, both nostrils, even the crotch of my underwear. I fought for control.

And then the final blow fell, as swift and sudden as a meteor shrieking down from outer space and against all odds blasting through the roof of the auditorium and drilling right into the back of my reeling head. My father raised a hand to indicate that the jokes were over, and the audience choked off as if he'd tightened a noose around each and every throat. Suddenly, he was more professorial than the professors—there wasn't a murmur in the house, not even a cough. He held up a book, produced a pair of wire-rim glasses—a prop if ever I saw one—and glanced down at me. "The piece I want to read tonight, from 'Blood Ties,' is something I've wanted to read in public for a long time. It's a deeply personal piece, and painful, too, but I read it tonight as an act of contrition. I read it for my son."

He spread open the book with a slow, sad deliberation I'm sure they all found very affecting, but to me he was like a terrorist opening a suitcase full of explosives, and I shrank into my seat, as miserable as I've ever been in my life. He can't be doing this, I thought, he can't. But he was. It was his show, after all.

And then he began to read. At first, I didn't hear the words, didn't want to—I was in a daze, mesmerized by the intense weirdness of his voice, which had gone high-pitched and nasal all of a sudden, with a kind of fractured rhythm that made it seem as if he were translating from another language. It took me a moment, and then I understood: this was his reading voice, another affectation. Once I got past that, there were the words themselves, each one a little missile aimed at me, the hapless son, the victim who only wanted to be left lying in the wreckage where he'd fallen. He was reading a passage in which the guilt-wracked but lusty father takes the thirteen-year-old son out to the best restaurant in town for a heart-to-heart talk about those lusts, about dreams, responsibilities, and the domestic life that was dragging him down. I tried to close myself off, but I couldn't. My eyes were burning. Nobody in the auditorium was watching him anymore—how could they be? No, they were watching me. Watching the back of my head. Watching the fiction come to life.

When he got to the part where the son, tears streaming into his chocolate mousse, asks him Why, why dad, why, I stood up, right there, right in the middle of the front row, all those eyes drilling into me. I tore my hand away from Victoria's, stared down the biographer and Dr. Delson and all the rest of them, and stalked straight out the nearest exit, even as my father's amplified voice wavered, faltered, and then came back strong again, nothing wrong, nothing the matter, nothing a little literature wouldn't cure.

I DON'T know what happened between him and Victoria at the muted and minimally celebratory dinner later that night, but I don't suspect it was much, if anything. That wasn't the problem, and

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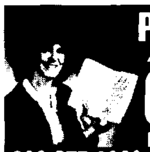

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both of us—she and I, that is—knew it. I spent the night hiding out in the twenty-four-hour laundromat wedged between Brewskies Pub and Taco Bell, and in the morning I ate breakfast in a greasy spoon only the townies frequented, and then I caught up on some of Hollywood's distinguished products at the local cineplex for as long as I could stand it. By then, I was sure the great man would have gone on to his many other great appointments, all his public posturing aside. And that was just what happened—he cancelled his first flight and hung around till he could hang around no longer, flying out at 4:15 with his biographer and all the sympathy of the deeply yearning and heartbroken campus. And me? I was nobody again. Or so I thought.

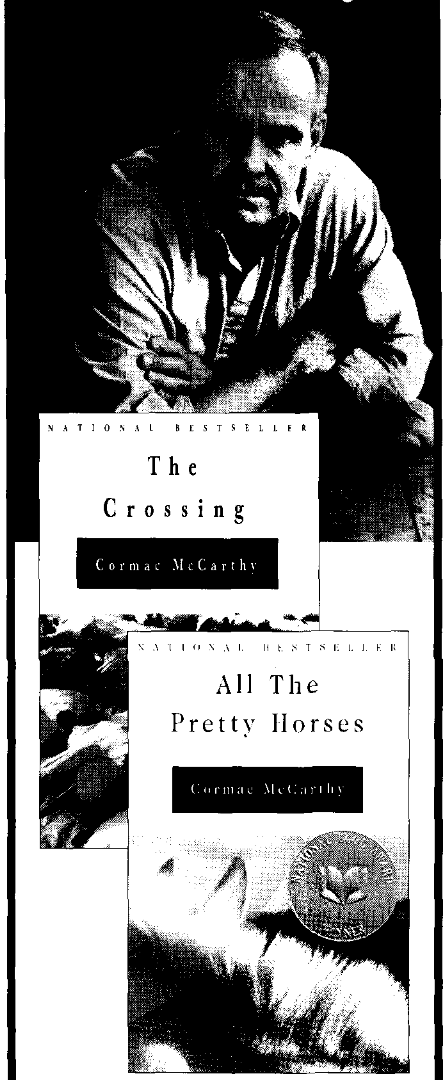
I, too, dropped out of Dr. Delson's class—I couldn't stand the thought of that glazed-blue look of accusation in her eyes—and though I occasionally spotted Victoria's hair riding the currents around campus, I avoided her. She knew where to find me if she wanted me, but all that was over, I could see that; I wasn't his son, after all. A few weeks later I noticed her in the company of this senior who played keyboards in one of the local bands, and I felt something—I don't know what it was, but it wasn't jealousy. And then, at the end of a lonely semester in a lonely town in the lonely hind end of nowhere, the air began to soften, and a few blades of yellow grass poked up through the rotting snow, and my roommate took me downtown to Brewskies to celebrate.

The girl's name was Marlena, but she didn't pronounce it like the old German actress who was practically dead before she was born, she said Mar-*lenna*, the second syllable banged out so it sounded as if she were calling herself Lenny. I liked the way her smile showed off the gold caps on her molars. The band I didn't want to mention earlier was playing through the big speakers over the bar and there was a whole undercurrent of noise and excitement mixed with the smells of tap beer, Polish sausage, and salt-and-vinegar chips. "I know you," she said. "You're, um, Tom McNeil's son, right?"

I never looked away from her, never blinked. All that was old news now, dead and buried, like some battle in the Civil War.

"That's right," I said. "How did you guess?" ♦

Cormac McCarthy



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BOOKS

THE MAN WITHIN

A biography tries to expose what Graham Greene already revealed.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

In an age increasingly reluctant to read anything but E-mail, why do biographies of literary practitioners continue to pile up? These great scholastic mounds of summarized writings, faded gossip, and reconstructed travel schedules seem monuments in a perfect desert waste, products of the same regressively logocentric tendency that litters the walls of art museums with more and more commentary, to the point where one's eyes are too busy ever to rest on the pictures. Creativity is no longer trusted to speak for itself; as in tabloid journalism, existence (the life) enjoys priority over essence (the performance, the works).

Graham Greene, having led a long life full of travels and seductions and problematical elements, poses a bright flame for investigative moths. His letters are drifting into institutions where they can be consulted, the details of his wartime career as a spy are coming to light, and his wife of more than sixty years, Vivien, for decades a mere rumor on the fringe of Greene's fame, has emerged as a lively octogenarian widow willing to talk about the early years of their marriage, his infidelities, and the long estrangement that took shape in the nineteen-forties. In 1994, as Norman Sherry's authorized biography serenely steamed into its second volume and thirteen-hundredth page, with a coming third volume guaranteed to cover the remaining thirty-six years of Greene's life, Great Britain saw a brace of other biographies: the long-delayed and much trimmed "Graham Greene: Three Lives," by Anthony Mockler, and the rather assaultive "Graham Greene: The Man Within," by Michael Shelden. The latter work has now been published by Random House ($27.50), with many small revisions and a more provocative subtitle, "The Enemy Within." Mr. Shelden, who has previously written biographies of Cyril Connolly and George Orwell, was, like Mr. Mockler, forbidden to quote from Greene's correspondence and unpublished work. This handicap, however, has lightened his luggage and enabled him to speed in a mere four hundred pages from Greene's birth in 1904 to his death in 1991; it has also compelled him to speak in his own voice, so that his narrative does have some polemical urgency as he assembles his proofs that Greene was a cruel, devious, nasty, insincere, and radically unhappy man. Sherry's more thorough biography, brimming with direct quotation and with an authorized biographer's judicious circumspection, makes a relatively diffuse and episodic impression. The details flow on and on but seem shaped to no single image, no story with a moral. Take, for example, the mild manner in which Sherry introduces Catherine Walston, the great adulterous love of Greene's life: "When Catherine met Greene, she and Harry had been married for twelve years and he was not a man to censure his wife's love affairs." Of the same circumstance, Shelden writes rousingly:

> In an effort to win her love, Harry gave her whatever she wanted and let her do whatever she wanted. If something made her happy, he was happy. By the early 1940s she had discovered that one thing that made her very happy was to sleep with all manner of men.

In Sherry's careful account of Greene's childhood, there is no leap to judgment like this paragraph of Shelden's:

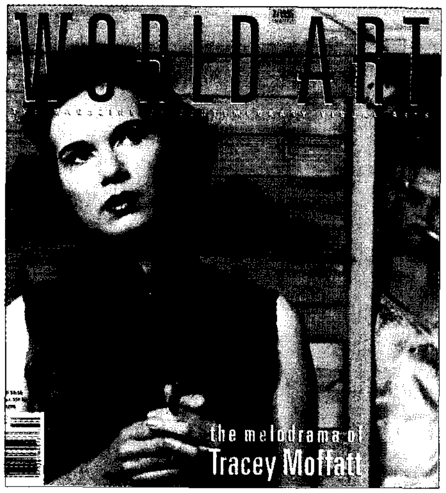
> He found an odd sort of freedom in killing things. Told to find snails in the garden and dispose of them, he carried out his mission with considerable zest. He put them in a bucket, poured salt on them, and watched them turn into foam. For every hundred snails he destroyed, he received a small amount of money. There was also cash to be had from eliminating cabbage white butterflies. These killing sprees gave him such satisfaction that he made a great game out of them in adulthood. During his wartime stay in Sierra Leone, he enjoyed a "glorious" slaughter when he managed to kill more than three hundred flies in four minutes. Everyone hates flies, but it takes a special person to time a mass murder of the pests, and then to do a body count. According to Malcolm Muggeridge, Greene also liked to buy ant farms and wipe them out with boiling water.

Shelden evokes this insecticidal monster without acknowledging that the details (including the fly count in Sierra Leone) have been lifted—decontextualized and hardened in tone—from Greene's autobiography "A Sort of Life," or that small boys are not unusually enlisted in the elimination of garden pests. Nevertheless, a feature of a psychological landscape has been vividly flagged, and ties in with fictional details: in "England Made Me," Minty traps a spider under a glass and observes its struggles and slow death for five days; in "Brighton Rock," Pinkie is sadistic toward Rose and extolls the hell-fire doctrine of "torments"; in "Our Man in Havana," the government enforcer Captain Segura reflects, "One never tortures except by a kind of mutual agreement." Greene's sexual transactions with prostitutes and some of his mistresses included, by mutual agreement, such S & M refinements as their inflicting cigarette burns on him. That this connoisseur of human despair and its passing easements should find pain an entertainment is not surprising; but Shelden oversimplifies the psychology and the metaphysics of it. A less sensitive, less empathetic boy would not have watched as the snails "exploded into foam" (Greene's own phrase) with such intentness that he could evoke the horror a half century later. A compulsive observer of violence—Hemingway was another—may be driven to participate in rites of destruction but does not necessarily describe cruelty as an endorsement: as a protest, rather, against the universe that, with God's evident permission, contains so much pain.

Greene's imagination had its macabre and murderous side, no doubt, and his childhood flirtations with suicide left him on friendlier terms with extreme measures than most of us. Nevertheless, it seems outrageous to imply, as Shelden does, that he was an actual murderer. Marshalling facts with the zealous woolliness of the Simpson defense team, Shelden notes the "graphic description" in Greene's "It's a Battlefield" of a female murder victim's being cut up and placed

Greene with Catherine Walston in 1959. Their affair was tormented, but sacrilegious?

in a trunk; three months after the book was published, a dismembered torso was discovered in the Brighton railway station. The time of this Brighton murder and that of Pinkie's fictional crimes in "Brighton Rock" are roughly the same, and Shelden forges a sinister link between a Detective-Sergeant Sorrell mentioned in the actual Brighton case and the presence in the room of the novel's amateur detective, Ida Arnold, of Warwick Deeping's "Sorrell and Son," which, at the end of the novel, is stolen! Greene's other works, including his notations of his dreams, are ransacked for telltale representations of bodies in baggage and of a killer's guilt, to flesh out the possibility that Greene murdered and dismembered and packed up a woman in the early nineteen-thirties. After all, didn't his hero T. S. Eliot write, in "Sweeney Agonistes," "Any man might do a girl in / Any man has to, needs to, wants to / Once in a lifetime, do a girl in"? Even if



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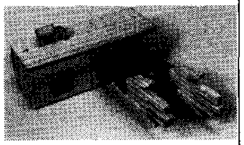

Shelden's sensational and artfully hedged charge doesn't stick, Greene was surely a killer in his prose: "We may never know why Greene's imagination was drawn to the Brighton case; all that matters now is the way his fantasies of violence against women affect his art."

An example of this verbal violence, and a typically one-dimensional reading of Shelden's, is the treatment of Ida Arnold in "Brighton Rock." Of the big-breasted, good-hearted barmaid Shelden writes:

> She argues in favor of common decency and fair play. Her way is right, and Pinkie's is wrong, and there is no middle ground. But her efforts to assert moral authority are consistently undermined by Greene's efforts to ridicule her simplistic thinking and her vulgar manners. . . . She is portrayed as a gross, cowlike figure who eats and drinks too much, and who pushes herself into places where she does not belong. Her big breasts make her look both intimidating and absurd.

To be sure, Greene, like Eliot—whose "Waste Land" is repeatedly echoed in the novel—disdained life-loving, good-hearted, guilt-free animal health. But in an era of absurd detective heroes—Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, John Dickson Carr's Gideon Fell—Ida does not forfeit our sympathy as drastically as Shelden suggests. In my own experience of the novel, the reader is grateful for Ida's vigilance on behalf of the besmitten, defenseless Rose, and is cheered when Pinkie, his face smoking with vitriol, jumps over a cliff. Pinkie's face at the end is stripped of demonic authority: "It was like a child's, badgered, confused, betrayed; fake years slipped away—he was whisked back towards the unhappy playground."

Greene does not ask that we forfeit our basic moral bias, for the victim and against the culprit. A conventional morality, not unlike that of the motion pictures he admired, reviewed, and helped produce, stands behind his gothic variations on thriller plots. He is no blithely anarchic Céline or Henry Miller. Shelden observes with alarm, "Before we know it we are tempted to sympathize with Pinkie's hatred of Ida and Rose." But isn't a purpose of a novel to lead our sympathies into unexpected byways? To show us the wounded schoolboy behind an arch-villain's face? To explore the pathology of our—in Christian terms—fallen world? "Brighton Rock" ends with a tender and solemn dialogue between Rose and a priest who tells her, "The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy." Shelden sniffs: "Priests say such things, and they may be right. But the novel gives the concept absolutely no support. . . . It does not simply tell us that the world is evil. It rubs our noses in the evil and makes fun of us for trying to understand it. And Greene does all this with such brilliance that we cannot help being amazed. Rarely has sheer nastiness been served so well."

Such a reading indicates a limited grasp of how fiction functions. It is a novelist's exact duty to "rub our noses" in his apprehensions of the truth, paradoxical and dismal though they may be. Greene is under no obligation to check his dark thoughts and perverse impulses at the door of his creations; he is obliged only to objectify and vivify them in the form of characters and actions. Fiction concerns dramatized tensions, not settled conclusions. Greene's value as a religious novelist lies not in embodied homilies but in his agonized sense of faith's shaky ground in the unhappy human condition. That the "good" characters are absurd or fallible and the "bad" ones sometimes heroic is part of the news he brings, giving his world its unique, bristling texture. That a womanizer should bear a considerable animus toward women and a Roman Catholic frequently mock the Church merely locates the area of his fascination and dependency.

Shelden quite misconstrues, I think, the sincerity of Greene's Catholicism, at least as it was up through the writing of "The End of the Affair." Shelden is indignant that that novel won a Catholic award, and says, "It is a shame—for truth's sake—that an anti-God organization was not available to present him with an outstanding achievement award. No major novelist has shown as much ingenuity in abusing the God of Christianity." He takes the novel's anti-religious narrator, Maurice Bendrix, as Greene's very voice, and cites the book's ending, with its "extraordinary outburst of hatred" directed at God, as if it were one of the author's letters to the editor. "Among blasphemers, Maurice is a pro," Shelden says. "Of course, the real pro is Graham Greene, who found a safe way to convey the sacrilegious nature of his affair with C." Greene's long affair with "C."-Catherine Walston was tormented, and in violation of the sixth commandment, but sacrilegious?

In this rich and glamorous American, Greene met his spiritual match; like him, she was promiscuous, frisky, hard-drinking, and a Catholic convert. In 1947, in the first fever of their romance, he wrote her, "I'm not even a Catholic properly away from you. . . . It's odd how little I get out of Mass except when you're around. I'm a much better Catholic in mortal sin!" In 1950, in the throes of writing "The End of the Affair," he wrote her:

> St. Theresa stands by my bed & every time I turn to her . . . I pray for us. But I'm afraid my prayer is always that God's will shall be in favour of our love. Don't be too sure that it may not be & who knows whether the peace we have so often got together has not been *with* him, instead of against him?

These are not the professions of a diffident or hypocritical Christian. His faith was racked and, as it were, exacerbated by this, his most passionate affair. "The End of the Affair" is his most God-filled novel. Maurice's atheism is clearly a losing battle; his hatred of God is hatred of a successful rival, not of a nonentity. There is an embarrassing wealth of literal miracles: Sarah Miles does not know she was secretly baptized a Catholic but in crisis acts as a Catholic; she apparently resurrects her lover by promising God to end the affair; from beyond the grave she cures a sick boy and erases an evangelical rationalist's disfiguring strawberry birthmark. The novel reeks of an ineluctable, inconvenient creedal literalism: Sarah writes to Maurice, "I believe there's a God—I believe the whole bag of tricks; there's nothing I don't believe; they could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I'd believe."

The "whole bag of tricks" chimes with one of Shelden's least savory implications—that "a novelist needs his props" and that Greene "could dispense with the theology, but he could not do without the plaster statues, the candle flames, the Communion wafers, the wine in the chalice, the rosary beads, the Latin phrases, the stuffy confessionals, the figure of Christ hanging above the altar with his painted wounds." In the English edition, the statues are called "garish," the candles "ghostly," and the wafers "stale." Roman Catholicism, that is, with its awful old trappings, supplied seediness to the neighborhoods of Greeneland. Shelden claims that Greene never surrendered his schoolboy hostility to Christianity, and "simply expanded his opportunities for subversion by presenting himself as a member of the largest—and most complex—Christian denomination"; in his fiction he subverts the faith by "associating it with adulterers, murderers, suicides, and whiskey priests." Obtusely and unconscionably, Shelden ignores the central point of "The Power and the Glory"—that an imperfect man may still, as a priest, administer the sacraments and further the faith. Shelden pounds at the whiskey priest's failings like a temperance tract: "Religion gives him a way to dignify a meaningless life of dissipation. . . . He may be a drunk, but at least he is God's drunk. Because he is the last priest, God is stuck with him, whether he likes it or not. But as the Hollow Man, he knows that he represents nothing." Nothing as himself, perhaps, but in his office a great deal. Another corrupted priest in the novel spells out the moral: "That was what made him worthy of damnation—the power he still had of turning the wafer into the flesh and blood of God." To read Greene without any sense of the sacramental—of God as a veiled but detectable and active force in the world, of Greeneland's hot border with the realm of the supernatural—is to deny the devil, so to speak, his due.

SHELDEN'S biography loses its polemical thrust as his subject's faith slackens and Greene enters his long middle period as a world-roving, world-famous author and political gadfly. To our post-Cold War ears, Greene's once scandalous anti-American quips have a milder ring. In New York to accept the Catholic award for "The End of the Affair" in 1952, he chastised McCarthyism in what now seem sweetly reasonable tones:

> I'm speaking this way because I like America and Americans. . . . People came here not to win television sets or refrigerators but to gain freedom from the house spies, the informers, the military regimes. But there are a lot of informers going around here now. . . . As part of their religious beliefs all Catholics should be opposed to this.

His sketch of the Vietnam situation in "The Quiet American" proved remarkably prescient; Alden Pyle seems caricatural as a character but convincing as a harbinger of our ruinous good intentions. Concerning Greene's notorious loyalty to the spy Kim Philby, his boss, in 1943-44, in Section V (Iberian Department) of the

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and the sobering modesty
of their general way of living.
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with only cold-blooded residents
and no human angle.
It would echo with a thousand castanets
and no flamencos.

—Kay Ryan

Secret Intelligence Service, Shelden offers a mitigating speculation: Greene saw through Philby and, caught between the undesirable alternatives of becoming involved in treachery or betraying his friend the traitor, abruptly resigned from the S.I.S., in May of 1944. According to Shelden, Greene wove his suspicions into "The Third Man," with a portrait of Philby as the charming and perfidious Harry Lime. Norman Sherry's biography briefly entertains the same possibility—"If Greene did suspect Philby, it would be just the kind of thing that would catapult him out of the service rather than share his suspicions with the authorities"—and goes on to suppose that Greene's widely deplored failure to denounce Philby after the unmasked spy defected, in 1963, might have been a patriotic, government-approved ploy to maintain contact and reënlist the bored defector in the S.I.S., as its mole in Moscow and the K.G.B. The K.G.B., in truth, never trusted Philby, and gave him trifling duties. Anthony Mockler, in his "Three Lives" biography, notes that after the Second World War Greene kept only Philby and John Cairncross, of all his old S.I.S. colleagues, in his address book; Cairncross, of course, was "the Fifth Man"—the fifth Communist spy after Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Philby, and Sir Anthony Blunt. Mockler offers his "instinctive feeling" that Greene knew "that Kim Philby and John Cairncross were passing secret information on to the Soviets; that he approved; and that, in a minor way, he helped. But, all the same, he had no desire to go too far; to become too deeply embroiled. He was almost forty, and a family man *malgré lui.*" It is odd that Shelden stops short of saying that Greene helped pass secrets (at a time when the Soviets were our embattled allies but anti-Communism reigned at the S.I.S.), especially since Greene's unchallenged resignation would even more forcefully illustrate Shelden's point that he "was adept at escaping from any trap."

But trapped in loneliness and a sour depression the writer did remain, as his novels grew briefer and wearier, and his fascination with misery led him to one global sore spot after another (Haiti, Batista's Cuba, the dictatorships of Paraguay and Argentina). He enjoyed the friendship of Panama's dictator Omar Torrijos, of Castro, and of the Sandinistas, and said that, given the choice, he would rather live in the Soviet Union than the United States. Resident since 1966 in Antibes, he sought to expose shady doings in Nice with a pamphlet pompously titled "J'Accuse." Shelden has little use for any of Greene's public gestures, such as returning the Legion of Honor to the French government and resigning from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; they were "publicity stunts." His numerous letters to the editor, collected as "Yours Etc.: Letters to the Press, 1945-89," form "a kind of joke book." Shelden lays the blame for these effusions on "mood swings," alcohol, and bad company: "Wealth and fame had put

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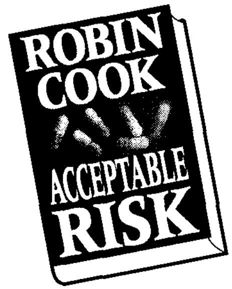

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Greene in the company of rich men who enjoyed idle jests, but it was not the best company for a novelist whose talent was already suffering from a lack of focus." For all the political noise he made, Greene had no real agenda:

> Whether he was drunk or not, he demonstrated his lack of seriousness again and again by the dilettantish fashion in which he moved quickly from one controversy to the next, rarely bothering to substantiate his charges in extended debates or to follow them up with some sort of constructive action.

Well, are extended debates what we ask of a creative artist? Is he not licensed to play with the world, in order to recreate it? A mind not "dilettantish" would scarcely stoop to the patchy labor of stitching fiction together out of facts, memories, impressions, and flights of fancy. That Greene chose to exercise his fancy in public statements shows a lifelong addiction to print and a schoolboy prankishness but does not diminish the harrowing passion and authenticity of his best novels. After all that Shelden says of Greene's duplicities, perversities, and frivolities, his portrait is less devastating and scornful than those Greene painted of such alter egos as Fowler in "The Quiet American" and Querry in "A Burnt-Out Case." The entire climate and topography of Greeneland form a kind of self-portrait; its features are pain, guilt, ennui, and lassitude. Out of whatever depravities he needed, out of whatever depressions he overcame, Greene managed in his best novels to locate modern men and women in the old Christian space, giving them souls and the urgency that the concepts of sin and damnation bestowed upon human decisions. The feat could be said to be an unnatural one—though less unnatural in a day when a certain Christian party still existed in literature, led by T. S. Eliot—but a feat it was, carried forward with admirable industry, clarity of observation, and narrative tautness. Even a late bagatelle like "Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party" has its forward pull and its flashes of cinematic scene-making.

Greene's bright side—his creative, intelligent, disciplined side—gets grudging lip service in Shelden's indignant account, but it existed. Greene among his many diligences kept a record of his dreams, and his last literary task was to assemble some of them into the book titled "A World of My Own: A Dream Diary." The world of his dreams was surprisingly crisp and sunny. The mighty dead, literary and political, convivially conversed with him, indicating that his subconscious had assimilated his global celebrity. The erotic strain so strong in his life and work was discreetly suppressed except for the odd detail like "Suddenly someone thrust a large fat spider into my trousers and I felt it grasp my penis." He was, by birth, an Edwardian; the most shocking (to me) fact in Shelden's biography is that Greene never learned to operate any kind of motorized vehicle. The dream he places first is titled "Happiness" and concerns a ride on an antiquated railway. A train "of pretty carriages which must have dated back more than a hundred years" pulls out, and then he boards a train whose passengers "all wore strange clothes—Edwardian or Victorian." The stations they glide through seem stations of childhood: "On one wide platform children were playing with scarlet balloons; another station was built like a ruined Greek temple; at one point the track narrowed and the train went through a kind of tunnel made with mattresses." Greene tells us, "I had never in my life felt such a sensation of happiness." In the dream placed last, he writes a verse for a competition in a magazine called *Time and Tide* on the subject of his own death. It concludes on a sweet, infantile note:

My breath is folded up
Like sheets in lavender.
The end for me
Arrives like nursery tea.

The trouble with literary biographies, perhaps, is that they mainly testify to the long worldly corruption of a life, as documented deeds and days and disappointments pile up, and cannot convey the unearthly human innocence that attends, in the perpetual present tense of living, the self that seems the real one. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

IN THE STACKS

BY IAN FRAZIER

THE main reading room of Butler Library, at Columbia University, is long and high-ceilinged. On a Saturday afternoon in summer, eight widely scattered people are studying in it. All appear to be of Asian descent; five are women. The tall windows are open; fans on tall stands push the hot air around. People and a dog are playing with a Frisbee on the lawn somewhere under the windows. You can hear the dog's jaws when he makes a catch. From the tables in the periodicals room, down the hall, you can see across a tennis court into the windows of a dormitory. A woman sits at a window, holding her long hair up off her neck with one hand.

Butler has twelve floors of library stacks—some aboveground, some partly below. The main entrance to the stacks, near the checkout desk, is through a propped-open door with a worn marble lintel. A librarian on a stool used to preside there sometimes, like a border guard. Past the entry, the dimensions narrow to submarine scale. Light in the stacks is dim, from overhead fluorescent bulbs. The central aisles in the acres of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves remain lit, but each tributary aisle is dark until you light it with an individual switch that is also a timer. If you turn the switch full to the right, the light in the aisle will stay on for fifteen minutes. Sometimes I turn the switch, go down the aisle, find the book I want, become engrossed, sit on the floor; then there's a click, and I'm in the dark. I sit in the dark for a while. At this same moment, Amsterdam Avenue is jumping, the trains to the Hamptons are packed, Washington Square is a hive. On certain summer days, the stacks of Butler are as quiet and lonesome as any place in the city.

At wider places in the aisles are chairs and wooden study tables big enough for only one person. I choose a table and read, say, a travel narrative from the nineteenth century, which crackles when it's opened and gives off hundred-year-old dust. Always, my eye starts to wander, tugged away by the graffiti on the table: "All men are meat"; "CIA killed Disney"; "BΘΠ dominates campus social life." In the remote parts of Butler, some tables are not just written on but embossed, washed, blued with spidery graffiti. I have found graffiti protesting wars from the Gulf War all the way back to the Korean. Only the more recent entries are really readable; to read the faded-out, historic ones you must get at an angle to the table and let the marks the pens made in the wood catch the light: "☮ Ban the Bomb"; "IMPEACH NI卐ON"; "Mondale Is Mush."

In the silence, the graffiti is a cacophony: "DAVID BOWIE IS SUPREME—GOD IS SUPREME—THEREFORE DAVID BOWIE IS GOD."

"You should be shot you fucking ASSHOLE!"

"They say that man is wise and I believe them—but then I also once believed in love."

"Oh go fuck yourself. Be wistful somewhere else."

"BΘΠ JOCKS RULE."

"Beta Theta Pi is full of idiots who think they're men because they can play speed-quarters until they puke. I love it when a 'man' vomits. (Trust me, I was there.)"

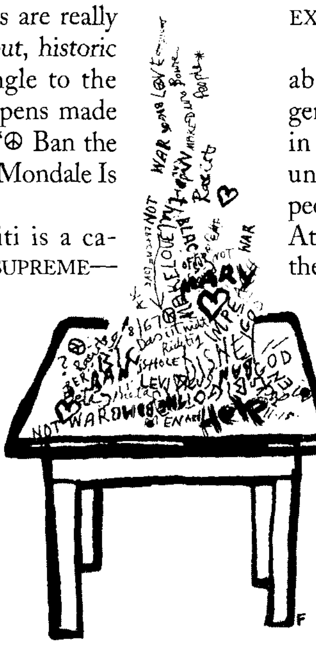
"I cut myself last night with a razor because I need help."

"YIDDISH FOREVER YOUNG."

"*Das ist nicht Richtig.*"

"Frat Neanderthal!"

"Bullshit stereotype you bigot! Liberal!"



"Gentlemen do be kind enough with the harsh words."

"Read LEVITICUS."

"Blacks are the *real* racists."

"We only learn from people like you."

". . . And Al Sharpton!"

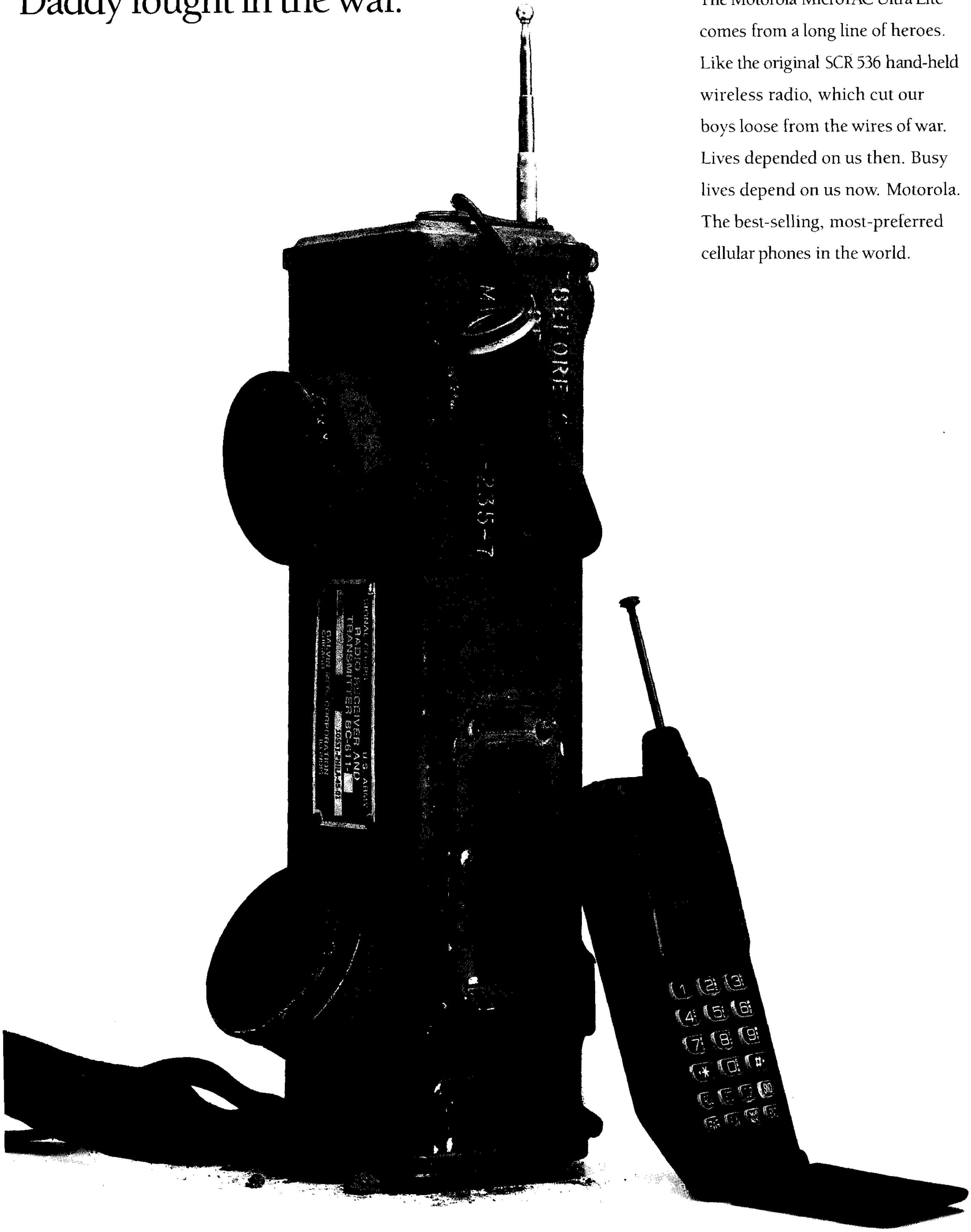
"Stop acting like martyrs and start treating whites like real people."

"Face reality—you are just frightened by the concept that people of color are educating themselves in white man's institutions (i.e. Columbia) and will one day step not on the white race but on *you.*"

"TOMORROW THERE IS A PHYSICS EXAM (11/15/83) HELP!"

Mostly, the graffiti is about longing. Libraries generate longing. It collects in the shelves and rustles under the desks and zaps people like static electricity. At Butler, the character of the longing is mostly male. More women should write on these desks, to improve the mix. Guys write, "Mary P. I'm in total love with you," and "There's this beautiful girl sitting in front of me; I cannot study," and they ask specific women for dates, and they say, "I want to make love to you in the stacks," and they describe acts they say they've committed on these very tables, and they say, "When Cara B—— struts through these dusty aisles this ancient storeroom of treasures comes to life," and they say that the best reason to go to Columbia is a certain woman named So-and-So, and they expound on amatory things they did or do. A woman's hand responds, "*You wish.*" ♦

Daddy fought in the war.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